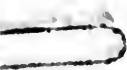




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AZETH: THE EGYPTIAN.

A NOVEL.

“ For if souls retained in their descent to bodies, the memory of divine concerns, of which they were conscious in the Heavens, there would be no dissensions among men about divinity.”

PORPHYRY.—DE ANTRO NYMPHARUM.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N :

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P R E F A C E .

In the following work a two-fold object has been kept in view ; to repeat .my own language, it has an *exoteric* and *esoteric* design. The one is to portray the ancient Egyptian in his daily life, and the other, to trace the gradual progress of a thinking and earnest soul from its first doubt of a false, to its final belief in a true, faith.

Sir Gardiner Wilkinson, Gliddon, Champollion, Rosellini, and other hierologists, are the authorities for

all respecting the domestic manners, religion, titles and occupations. The severe laws of Sethos—the mutiny of the oppressed soldiery, and their refusal to succour Pelusium, besieged by Sennacherib—the despair of the Priest-king—his vision before the shrine of Phtha, his Fire-God—and the fulfilment of the promise by means of the “Memphite Rats,” may be found in Herodotus.

The philosophic, yet practical character of Psammetichus is also historical. His sole sovereignty after the reign of the dodecarchy, and the manner of his obtaining the crown, to which I have alluded, are facts.

In the introduction of Arabs and of Druids, the theories of Upham, Vallancey, Higgins, &c., have been followed. Most antiquarians agree in the belief of an intercourse between Britain, Egypt, Arabia, and India, as also in the identity of their Secret Religions. “Strings of Leaves,” like the Peruvian quipos, were their means of communication. The portrait of the Chinese is dreadfully false as to time. Correctness was sacrificed to effect. The date of the tale is about 700 B.C. and my Man-

darin is a result of the Tartar infusion. Pauthier has lately proved that the "thsao," or "cursive writing," (running hand), on the vases said to have been found in the tombs, is of a later date than the occupancy of the hypogea ; so that a connexion between China and Egypt is still an open question. But this is too learned a point to be of importance in a work of fiction.

The metaphysical design will be apparent to most readers. Amasis and Azeth are embodiments of spiritual temptations, on the one side, and of spiritual weakness, joined to an intense longing for the True and the Good, on the other. Lysinoë, in her relation with Azeth, stands as a type of passive virtue, and the holy influence of a spiritualized love ; while in Amenophis, the religious truth and purity which are the latest revelations to the soul, are attempted to be expressed.

For the *learned* words which are introduced, I feel that I ought to apologize : but the reader must pardon me, on account of the intractability of the subject. A little attention will render them

all intelligible, as I have given the meanings, either directly or indirectly, at the least once.

And thus craving indulgence for my work, I commend it to the gentle guardianship of those who will consider the difficulty of the task as an excuse for the inadequacy of the execution, and who will merge the errors of performance in the sincerity of purpose.

THE AUTHOR.

London, Dec. 1846.

AZETH: THE EGYPTIAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHASTISEMENT FOR SIN.

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THERE was weeping and mourning among the angels of the stars, for Sohaik the Beloved had fallen! The most glorious—the most beautiful—was banished from the skies, and his star was darkened, and its radiance dimmed.

From Zohar, his high place in the eternal heavens, he had looked down on the fair, green earth: and its daughters had bewitched his

heart, and led him captive in the strings of their loveliness. And an unspiritual fire—the fire of Passion—crept into the Angel's soul, and burnt it to the centre.

Then his dwelling place in that shining star, where, throned in the majesty of godlike dominion, brightness and glory had poured their living tide about his way—from henceforth became to him bitterness and agony; and his best-loved companions amongst the sinless spirits grew hateful to his sight. His whole being was hung on frail mortality; and the pure and holy things were unwelcome.

And, in the midnight hours, when only the pitying smile of the gentle moon stole through the silvery mists of the sky, he would leave the Blue Above to wander over the face of the world, drooping and sad—his glory fled—his beauty darkened—care shadowing his once stainless brow—passion raging in his once unsullied heart.

The shadow of earth had fallen on the heavenly: and peace had died with purity.

In vain shone the celestial splendours; in vain sounded the celestial melodies. To one listening to the Siren's song below these call unheard. In vain bright troops of his

own kind came round him with many a soft smile, and many a clear-voiced hymn: he turned from them all—for their consolations were barren, and their songs of gladness unavailing. And even from Zamiyad, the loveliest of the starry seraphs, he veiled his face, careless of her tears, careless of her prayers. Earth! earth! was his beloved. How should he look on a higher?

Then, the Dark Angel, Duma, the terrible and strong, came to Sohaik, bearing the irrevocable decree:

“To him for whom mortality is so pleasant, that it can make unlovely the stars and their joys, the chastisement of human life is decreed. Human life, with its weary search, and vague perceptions of truth—and its blindness; its ceaseless strivings, and vain desires after good—and its impotence. This is the lot of Sohaik, the Angel of Zohar; until after sorrows, and wanderings, and painful tears poured out in the bitterest agony which the soul may know, he shall rightly discern, and rightly chose, and be repentant and purified!”

And the star, Zohar, was darkened—blotted out from the sky and quenched.

And Zamiyad and all the angels wept bitterly ; for Sohaik, the beloved, had fallen !

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CHAPTER II.

THE PRIEST. THE SCRIBE'S CHEMISTRY.

THE evening sacrifice was over, and the worshippers had departed, when Amasis, High Priest of Amun, issued from the Adytum of the Grand Temple of Thebes. The leopard-skin mantle, in which he had just performed the sacred ceremony, still hung over his tall and majestic form; but its grim beauty seemed to adorn some proud warrior or daring huntsman, rather than a meek-lived priest. It seemed a trophy of victory over a fierce brute enemy, rather than the badge of the revealer of holy, spiritual mysteries—the garb of the professor of an inactive, contemplative philosophy, the teacher of an abstruse religion. Yet Amasis was a perfect representative of the faith which he professed, in the strange union of its truth and falsehood, his own beauty and darkness.

He was a man of singularly noble appearance, with features, faultless in beauty, as expressive of the power of intellect, as they were of the usually accompanying power of passion. His large, flashing eyes shone out from their thick lashes like living flame; and their fiery glances seemed to light up his dusky brow with an unearthly glow,—one of weird meaning, and dark thought. The compressed, though full lip, and thin, arched nostril, bore the lines of pride and haughty self-reliance; their contemptuous curl and impatient dilation spoke eloquent volumes of the nature within, to one able to read the spirit's impress on the features. His right arm uncovered, as was the priestly custom during sacrifice and offering, had served well for the ideal of strength and symmetry; strength and symmetry which his stately neck, graceful as a wild stag's, served but to make more manifest. His feet, left bare by the simple reed-sandle, were finely moulded; his step was firm and dignified; and his whole air had that undefinable expression of conscious superiority, which, not merely by look or gesture, but by something felt, even if unseen, impresses others with awe and respect. The very air as the

priest passed seemed hushed as if spell-bound, and hung heavy and still; and the shadow which his figure threw was deeper than that caused by any other. He looked like the impersonation of the genius of his religion as he moved through the colossal hall of the temple—dark, mysterious, beautiful, yet unloved; for, notwithstanding his nobleness of exterior, there was a hidden spirit from which most men instinctively shrank, that, like a spectre looming through the twilight, blackened where it stood. In the cup of the fairest, in the kiss of the sweetest, flower may lurk death; and so the soul's worst poisons often hide beneath the most lovely gifts of mind, and person, and embodiments. Yet the union of Beauty and Evil is one of the unfathomable mysteries of life—one of nature's contradictions.

Round the Hierophant hung chains and bands of glittering gold; and gems that flashed out their different rays as though each sparkle lived, while the lamp-light shone upon them. The long loose links, pendant leaves, and small bells, into which these ornaments were wrought, clashed together as the priest walked, making a sweet, tinkling

noise like elfin music. But little he heeded either the richness of his attire or the grandeur of the majestic place in which he stood; the heavy weight of dark cares and darker thoughts that pressed on his soul, was all he felt or knew. And if by chance he raised his eyes from the black stone floor, and allowed them to rest on the glowing pictures and vivid representations painted on the walls, or on the countless hieroglyphs and colossal figures, sculptured on the gigantic columns in one mass of elaborate beauty, it was with that dull gaze of abstraction which shows how widely separate are sense and thought.

Slowly he traversed the Grand Hall, until he arrived at the large bronze doors, which led from the sekos into the last pronaos or entrance court, when turning aside, and opening a small, and scarcely visible door in the wall itself, he entered a low, narrow passage. This was one of many which encompassed the temple, and by which the priests could hear as distinctly as if immediately present, all that was passing in those places from which they were separated in sight alone. Yet not always were they even thus separated; and not always were the scenes, passing, as their actors fondly thought,

in solitude and privacy, unseen by the learned of the Temple; for mirrors could reflect back objects, though the place of their tell-tale surface was hidden; and echoes, and babbling walls could repeat syllables, uttered never so faintly. Many a supernatural wonder, and many a sinner terrified with supernatural threats and revelations, proved the efficacy of these miracle-working ways!

The priest's path was perplexed and intricate, and with difficulty distinguished from the labyrinth of similar others which branched out from, and converged into it, in every direction. But Amasis pursued his way with the confidence of long familiarity, and pressed forward unhesitatingly, holding always to the left, until stopped by an apparently insurmountable barrier; for the passage suddenly terminated in a solid wall. After examining the stones for some time with many an impatient exclamation at the over-prudence of the ecclesiastical architects, and many a threat to open the path effectually for the future, the Hierophant at last touched the secret spring concealed in the masonry. A portion of this instantly rolled back in the form of a low door, and disclosed another corridor, broader and wholly

unilluminated, slanting downwards in an abrupt and steep descent, up which the air crept cold and dank, and brought with it an earthy smell of corruption, as if but just come from kissing the pale lips of the dead. The priest shuddered in spite of himself, and wrapped his calasiris, or robe, more closely round him then with sudden resolution, he passed through the opening. As his foot touched the ground on the other side, the door of stones turned again on its hinges, making a loud, stunning noise, reverberating in prolonged echoes, like thunder, through the passages. The person who passed through this charmed opening was shut out for ever from his former way ; for, though the door might readily be opened on that side by one acquainted with the secret, it was immovable on this.

Guiding his steps by the lamp which he had taken from the first passage, Amasis now descended the steep, slippery path, which, growing still wider and wider at last spread out into a large vault. A large vault, fearfully tenanted ! For ranged in ghastly rows, were troops of fleshless skeletons ; and here and there a pale corpse, looking as if some fiend had newly torn it from its grave, lay at their

feet, a sadder spectacle than them all ! Death, while retaining in the form the mockery of life, is a more fearful thing to look upon, than when he appears in his unshrouded horrors ; for man's nature revolts more at similitude than at supremacy in the terrible and loathly. The skeletons mowed and chattered, and gnashed their hollow jaws, and snapped their rattling fingers, while the livid corpses opened their dull eyes, and stretched out their cold arms beseechingly, as the priest's every foot-step fell. A blue, lurid flame played round the skull of each ;—a rare coronet for these lords of earth,—light and life crowning them even in death and decay ! They were not without their chains and garlands, too, these goodly troops !—for lithe, long snakes twined and twisted round their necks, and cinctured their arching ribs, as gold and jewels had done in life.

And toads, and worms, and gnawing rats, and lizards, and every loathsome beast, and every noxious reptile crawled on the black loamed floor, and sat enthroned on putrid fungi, the horrid monarchs of the place, or nestled with the snakes in the once proud heart's living home.

On the wall opposite to the entrance

were written in hieratic characters of a dull red colour, like the sullen glow of a dying ember, these mocking words:

“THE HOME OF THE IMMORTALS!

“THE THRONE OF ETERNAL KINGS!”

Amasis smiled as he read these words—a cold contemptuous smile; one had rather have seen a tear even in that strong man’s eye, than the chilly glitter of a smile like this.

“The Home of the Immortals!” he muttered half aloud: “The Throne of Eternal Kings! a bitter sneer for man’s living hand to trace over his fallen brother’s dust! Bitter, but just! For as much of immortality as is contained in this crumbling dust, doth the quick spirit contain and no more. An undying individual nature,—vain conceit! Vain as the fool’s belief that his mean race is the highest of intelligent creation, and his mean sphere the great system of the starry blue! Far different is my belief. I, indeed, think that immortality can be bought—but only by him who can subdue nature, and compel her to deliver up her secrets, who can constrain the World of the Invisible to do his bidding, and make himself the master of the angels. For the herd, the

embalmer's art is their sole exemption from oblivion and nothingness. This alone can keep their foul dust some few years from mingling with the life of earth, and from polluting the very sky with its corruption and its defilement. A few spices and herbs, and painted cere-cloths wrapping over all,—a few mystic ceremonies, as foolish as they are false—and lo! the slave, whom the very dogs have hounded to death as too vile to live, is caught up to the empyrean, and suddenly becomes as a God in the gloriousness of his everlasting felicity! Pah! the rankest weed hath a sweeter savour than this filthy thought! Were the enthusiast's Blest Groves of Amenti? peopled with all the human scum which now makes earth one large lazar house, give me annihilation, or the joys of solitary condemnation! For, to Amasis, a life of lonely tortures would be better than an existence of the dearest pleasures, if shared with the vulgar herd. But I have bought mine immortality; and from henceforth, my life is lone and undivided.

“Proud brother,” he continued, touching the long fingers of the skeleton nearest to him and shaking off a shining scarabæus. “Thou art in brave company! The gods and

the immortals of Egypt, together, in the same vault with thee—housed in the same slimy pit! Rare union!—the dignified emblem of creation and life in the grasp of death—batten-
ing on ruin!”

“And death is life. Creation, continual destruction,” said a low, droning voice. It was a priest repeating his lesson of the second initiation, through which he had just passed.

Amasis turned from the vault with a quickened step; for, in truth, it was not a place any had loved to linger in, unless he came to make a sacrifice of the pride of humanity before the shrine of stern reality, and to lay his cherished individuality on the altar of the fearful end, the Undistinguishable.

After passing through many places of horror equal to this—for he was now among the unembalmed inmates of the initiatory tombs—Amasis ascended a few steps, and entered a wide but low chamber. A man of mean and forbidding appearance, clothed in the dress of a sacred scribe, sat there intent on reading a lengthy roll of papyrus, with his case and materials for writing before him, and his tablets, blotted with ink, on his knee. Over the floor of the room, or rather cell, were scattered herbs, and

minerals, and utensils of uncouth shapes, like goblin footballs cast at random ; and mingled with them, lay human bones and skulls, and in the further corner, the yet warm bodies of several dead animals. Amongst them, were various fish, which gave out a pale, blueish light that formed a ghastly mirror in the widely opened eyes of the beasts, dilating and contracting as if in life. The walls and roof were covered with figures and letters traced in burning fire ; and a pan of charcoal, with a strange looking vessel hanging over it, was set in the midst of the room. Of the herbs and minerals, some were fresh and unbroken, while others had been subjected to the several processes necessary for extracting their hidden properties. They were the aconite, hellebore, belladonna, henbane, and many others, which together with peach-stones, and laurel boughs, were strewn over lumps of tin, copper, lead, silver, and a crust of unknown metal, similar in appearance, but not in identity, with steel.

The man looked up with a start of undisguised terror, as the hand of Amasis grasped his shoulder. But on recognising his uncere-
monious visiter, a singular smile of forced respect and involuntary familiarity accom-

panied the relieved exclamation with which he greeted him.

“ Still at thy studies, Chebron ? ” said the Hierophant, taking up the roll. “ Ah ! I see that thou hast appropriated to thine own use the Temple’s sacred book of the great Hermes. Thou art bold, scribe ! Yet say, what hast thou found therein, the value of which may plead thine excuse ? ”

“ I have found a guide through the dark maze in which I have been so long wandering,” answered Chebron. “ I have at last discovered the path to the hiding-place of the Great Secret, together with the key to the discovery after which I have so earnestly sought.”

“ The great secret of the Golden Lion will never be found by thee, or any to whom the thrice great Thoth hath not granted a Lord’s Mind ! ” replied Amasis, scornfully. “ But thy minor search thou mayst accomplish. It was for a poison so fatal and subtle that it might be enclosed in a ring or armlet and do its work—or transmitted by means of linen—papyrus—cloth ? Was it not this thou wert endeavouring to find ? ” he added, turning over the pages of the roll with affected carelessness.

“Thou rememberest then thy former desire for such a marvel?” said Chebron. “Thou art a noble philosopher!—few other Hierophants of the Pure Land would encourage such a science—at least in any save themselves.”

There was silence for some moments. The priest had sunk into a gloomy reverie; and Chebron was earnestly scanning his face as if to fathom the sealed depths of his thoughts.

At length Amasis spoke.

“Thou art playing with a deadly asp, my son,” he said, “and seeking, it may be, an unlawful thing. I counsel thee to conceal thy peculiar studies and researches from thy brethren; who perchance are not sufficiently freed from the bigot’s prejudices to look on them with tolerance, not to speak of approval. Thy secret is safe with me. Let it go no further.”

“I am grateful for thy counsel, O my father,” replied the scribe, bending low. “As also for the aid which thou hast, from the first, afforded me. I say again, thou art the sole Hierophant of the Two Worlds, who would have acted thus. Praise be thine.”

“Aid?” repeated Amasis haughtily. “Thou hast mistaken me strangely, if thou callest my

simple permitting thee to pursue thine own course, active assistance in such crooked path !”

“ I will recal the offensive expression,” Chebron said, with a downcast look of feigned humility. “ I meant not to offend thee, holy father ! I prize thy, I may add, friendship ?—that sudden frown says me, no !—then, thy gracious favour and indulgence too highly to lose them lightly !”

“ I am jealous for the honor of the Temple,” replied Amasis, coldly, “ and surely this would not be over well sustained, were its high priest to consort with one of the lowest of the Uninitiated in a task like this.”

“ Truly not ! truly not ! The higher castes must, as thou sayest, keep themselves intact and pure, while the lower must peril all in doing and finding that which these may enjoy in security and perfection. Doubtless it is all good !”

“ Darest thou to taunt me, slave !” exclaimed the priest, quickly. “ Have a care, Chebron, or thou mayst perchance weep a tear of blood for each word of thy coarse lips !”

“ Taunt thee, holy father ? I understand thee not. My mind could not, of itself, have

compassed the impiety of irreverence toward a Hierophant, unless *thou* hadst first offered it such a fearful spectre. Taunt thee ! Chebron taunt Amasis, the Pontiff of Amun."

"Well, peace!" replied Amasis, impatiently. "Thou art bold and insolent, and were it not for the use of which thou art to me, my anger should long ere this have crushed thee."

"Nay, surely thou art in jest, noble Amasis, or thou hast unwittingly revealed more than is expedient; for as yet thou hast made no acknowledged use of me. Is, then, the day of my value in the future, when the subtle poison-kiss is to be breathed on obnoxious lips. No other light shines on thy dark saying!" and his wicked eyes laughed sneeringly.

Amasis bit his lip in anger; then said proudly,

"When I companion, however distantly, with mine inferiors, it is my just desert that I should be wearied with their blindness and their thick deafness. Wouldst thou know of what use thou hast been to me? The same of which the mean worker of the gold mine is to the deft craftman. The one, like a vile worm, creeps and writhes through the earth, and casts up a mass of rubbish mixed with

richness. The jewel merchant comes, and fashions the rough ore delicately, and wreathes it into princely chains and ornaments, fit for the person of a God. And thou dost thus dig in thy dark, bemired pit; and dost throw up mounds of mingled gold and clay; but thy fat senses can neither distinguish nor separate them; and as long as they remain with thee the one is valueless as the other. But I, like that jewel-merchant, can find the bright metal though hidden under all thy sand, and flint, and pebbles. And I draw it forth, and take possession of it; and fashion it into a chain for my neck—a chain of added knowledge. Canst thou now understand me?"

"With my outward sense, yea!---but not with my reason," replied Chebron. "As I think that thou wouldst hardly acknowledge thyself to be a thief, O Amasis!---or that thou dost grasp at that for which thou hast never worked—appropriating the profits of another's toil. Thou wouldst hardly acknowledge me to be the discoverer of science; thyself but the user of foreign lights. And yet in spite of all false paint or dye, this is the true face of thy speech."

“ I deem thy worth beyond the worth of a yoked beast of burden, that drags the plough where driven, and turns up the rich earth when goaded on to the task by his master’s hand? *I* deem thee aught nobler? Thinkest thou that thou art aught higher in my sight? Then thou art indeed mad! Here, in thy narrow den, thou dost work and burrow in the dark and damp, and, by aimless experiments, viewed with the child’s gaping curiosity, and not with the sage’s clear vision of necessary results, by chance dost stumble on some truth heretofore hidden, or but imperfectly known. But this is the extent of thy powers. Thou canst not see farther than the actual presence of each effect. Thou canst not carry thy thoughts and speculations higher nor combine, nor class. These I do: and am, therefore, the Intelligent Will directing the member—the living hand guiding the senseless tool.”

“ Confess at least, father, that apart, both are alike useless!” cried the scribe familiarly.

“ The tool, yea,” replied Amasis, with a dark flush burning over his swarthy cheek and brow, and a glance, which would, had it the power, have slain the man. “ The tool with-

out the hand is a rust-worn, impotent piece of iron, fit only to be thrown on the refuse-heap : the member without the governing will is the speechless tongue and nerveless arm of a God-forgotten wretch—a thing scoffed and jeered at by the base rabble. And such art thou. And thou dost dream thyself into an equality with the Grand Hierophant of Thebes? Thou art marvellously humble! Canst thou not ascend into the awful place, and pluck the very Gods from their thrones?—for methinks thou art as nigh the one as the other. I am the initiated of both degrees—the child of the Hermetic Baptism—the holder of higher secrets than thy poor mind could contain—the possessor of powers of whose existence thou knowest not ; and thou, because thou canst grind minerals, and press deadly juices from filthy herbs, and with thy cursed compounds slay bird and beast and reptile, darest to rear up thy head as my peer. Dearly shalt thou repay thy bold insolence ! And dearly shalt thou learn who can stand and work alone, Amasis, High Priest of Amunrà, or Chebron, the low-born slave cowering on the last threshold of the temple.”

“ Thou mayst stand alone, and work alone, holy father !” returned Chebron insolently, “ but thou

wilt not stand so secure, nor wilt thou effect so much without as with my aid. Aye! frown as thou wilt!—it is even so! The noblest of our burnished galleys falls before the power of the puny worm, and our most majestic structure will crumble to dust at the silent touch of the disregarded insect. And thou, too, mayst fall—aye fall, Amasis! at the working of a low-born scribe! United, we may accomplish all. Separated, thou, for one, canst do nought!”

“Man!” exclaimed Amasis, “thinkest thou that the blood in my veins runs white with cowardice, that thou darrest thus boldly wag thy tongue, and class thyself and me as one? Am I one before whom any spirit—the best that ever wore fleshly garment—might stand and claim equality? what then from thee? Down, dog, to the earth!—and lick the dust from thy master’s feet, humbly as befitteth a slave!—but dare not to raisethy blearing eyes to him, as man to his fellow! Crouch and fawn, and bless thy birth star if I spurn thee not, nor crush thee beneath my heel; but dare not to bark when thou art beaten, nor bite when my kibe galls thee—else at a moment thou liest dead! Think on my reproof!” he added mor-

calmly, "the last which I will give thee in words! The next shall be taught in deeds!"

Chebron, whilst the priest spoke, leaned over the table, and took up a small vial half filled with a colourless liquid. "My father is unjust!" he said, playing with the vial. "Have I deserved his wrath? Then life is of no more value to me; for his approbation was the very sun of this life! And if I unloose to the freedom of the air, the spirit prisoned within these glass walls, I can at least procure myself the consolation of death, and not a lonely death, O Amasis!" a glance of hatred and exultation shot out from beneath his overhanging brows, as he watched the effect which these last words produced upon the priest.

Amasis started.

"Chebron! art thou distraught!" he exclaimed, endeavouring to wrest the bottle from his grasp. For though he himself had drank of the golden drink of immortality, yet for the present, Chebron was too useful to be lightly parted with. And this made him hold the scribe's hand.

"Nay, father!" replied Chebron, mistaking

whilst he repulsed his hand, "I am not distraught! I am but showing thee the power which I may have, even in my mud-tower, with the friendly help of such an ally as this! Thou canst not expect me to fetter mine own limbs? And yet it would be thus were I to part with this ally!"

"Come, my son!" said Amasis, after a short pause, suddenly changing his tone to one of pleasantry, and extending his hand with a smile, "I was too harsh with thee—thou too hasty with thy pontiff! And now give me that captive demon. It will be safer in my steady care than in thy rash keeping. Thou art too hot for such a perilous charge."

Chebron at first made no reply, still withholding his hand, and looking fixedly at the priest; then muttered half audibly, so that Amasis caught only broken sentences and isolated words, "I have other demons than this—and of thine own calling up too! Demons traced on a certain roll which thou once didst lose from thy chamber. Their names are Rebellion and Blasphemy. Now thou mayst resume thy natural manner; this sickly mask of gentleness will avail thee

nought ! Give thee the poison ?” he said aloud, carelessly. “ It will not answer thy purpose ; for it hath a traitor scent and flavour that would betray thee. And, besides this, it is not yet condensed to all the subtlety of which it is capable. Wait in patience !—and I will give thee, in time, a sufficiency to slay, with swift and terrible certainty, all that molest thee and disturb thy peace !”

The priest’s eyes flamed like fire through the darkness of the chamber ; but whether with fierce joy at the prospect of his coming treasure, or indignation at the scribe’s coarse tone, Chebron might not know. Yet it nearly maddened him that the mean thing which he had spurned and spat upon—the reptile which he had trodden under foot—laying aside his humbleness and submission, should have thus turned again and endeavoured to overmaster him ! He slightly bent his head, as if waiting for further communication ; but his tongue, parched with passion, refused to utter a sound.

“ Thou canst have thy choice,” pursued Chebron, quietly seating himself,—a familiarity which the meanest child of Egyptian parents had not dared to show, without an invita-

tion ; “thou canst have thy choice of this liquid, in which thou mayst steep wood, cloth, or linen, and which, if laid on the vermin—father !—thou wouldst slay, will accomplish all that thou mayst desire. Or thou canst have a powder, which, sifted over the petals of a half open bud, or mingled with the ripe seed in its cup, will swiftly lure the prey to thy net, and give them death through sweetness. Enclosed in the stone of a ring, or head-band, or in the links of a chain, or, better still, in an amulet—a thing to protect the wearer from every danger, itself bringing the greatest—and suddenly opened, it will answer the same end. This I hope to prepare, but have not yet accomplished ; at least, not perfected. Until then, O Amasis ! thy continued protection by thy *permission*—since I may not call it aid—and thy further benevolent support of an indigent servant of the gods, I must claim at thy hands. Thou wilt not *now* refuse me, methinks ?” he added in an under tone.

“Continue thy life as usual !” replied Amasis, in a husky voice, flinging down a handful of golden circular bars, “and come to me when thy poison is prepared.”

“Thy will is law, O my father;” said the scribe. And carefully gathering up the fallen pieces of money, he heaped them on the table in small pyramids, and coolly counted his gains.

Amasis turned from the chamber, and large drops stood on his forehead, whose twisted veins seemed about to start from their bonds with every pulse that beat.

“Slave!” he muttered, as he retraced his way through another corridor; “By thy poison thou thyself diest! First on the list of its slain, shall stand Chebron, the preparer! And even now would I have dealt him his death blow, were it not that he must live to work my will. But that will worked, he shall die! Amasis will suffer no base brow to brazen its insolent front thus against him and live!”

“Amasis!” hissed Chebron, in his ear. “Shall I send to Sethos, thy beloved monarch, an account of our labours, alone and united, as they stand recorded in thy private roll? For if deserted by thee, my patron, to whom but to the pontiff-king can I go?”

“And hast thou been deserted in the long

space of time that has elapsed since I left the door of thy cell, and placed my foot here? Thou hast marvellously quick apprehension! What has told thee that I have deserted thee?"

"The natural sense given me by the Great Thoth to preserve myself from danger and treachery, father! The eyes and ears with which my mother bore me."

"Go to—go to! thou art an idle babbler!" exclaimed Amasis, "thou art a frightened fool that makes of shadows weighty realities! Back to thy work, and be at rest."

"With thy good will at rest, in truth!" sneered Chebron, retreating. "But my sleeping time is not come yet—and I have a long and mighty work to do before I take my rest."

Amasis hurried away, and in a few moments was out in the calm air of the moonlight night, with the cool Nile breezes blowing fresh upon his brow.

"And so thou wouldst slay thy friend, O Amasis;" muttered Chebron, when, returned to his labours, he bent over the vessel that was hanging above the fire, crooning to himself like some foul wizard; "And thou wouldst give him only a hard, Osiris-blessed bier, and a cold

place in the stately tombs for his promised rich reward! Out on thy faithlessness! Do I work for this? By the gods, no! But thou hast no child to deal with, whom thou canst lead at thy will; for I look boldly on thee, and defy as I look! Many gifts thou hast, doubtless, at which the rabble may gape and wonder, but with me, they weigh as light as the dust of the lotus-seed! What care I for thy pretended knowledge of futurity, and thy readings in the star-writ-page?—I, who know they are but empty boasts, the easier wherewith to lead thy dupes, else hadst thou read thine own fate better! Neither care I for thy threats, nor thy prophecies; nor yet for thy Hermesian wisdom! I know the secrets of the labyrinthine passages within the walls of the sekos and adytum—yea, even of that one which thou fondly deemest hidden from all—that one, Anasis, which leads to the tower wherein thou hast placed thine Arab maid! And I, too, can lay my lips to the echoing tubes, and make my voice come out of stones and brutes, and call their words as thou dost call thine—the voices of gods forsooth! And I know the lives of not a few of ye—pure and holy priests!—which, did the fathers of Egypt's daughters know, they would tear ye limb from

limb, despite all your mystic amulets of religion's reverence ! And much such wisdom do I possess — enough to make me laugh at ye, spit on, and defy ye ! Gently, Chebron ! Now, methinks, it is thou that art playing the fool ! Thou knowest, and dost laugh. Good ! But thou mayst not defy, unless thou art enamoured of a lodging place among the unembalmed immortals of the vault. True ; I may not defy the superiors of the Temple : and yet, what did I not do and say even now to that proud priest ! Ha ! but flesh and blood could not support his arrogance ! He taunts me as a slave — a base mine digger—a vile tool—he, the master and deft craftsman, profiting by my toil. He makes use of me—sets me to burrow in my loathsome chamber, and find, with toil and pain, things which he may bring out into the light as his own. I am a menial to be threatened—a beast to be beaten and hounded on to the task ! I could not bear it patiently ! I that have his secrets sealed with his own signet ; his addresses inciting the people to desertion and rebellion ; his flat denial of his faith—all written fair and plain. And I am to crouch to one thus in my power ?—to kiss the hand, that, helpless in my own, dares to strike me like a froward child ?

Noble Hierophant ! I have thy secrets. What ! thou leavest doors and chests open, and treason lying therein ? Unwise Amasis ! thou art now in the serpent's den, and I swear by every god and demon thou dost not issue from it alive ! I am of use to thee ? I am to prepare poisons for thee to administer to myself ? Ha ! ha ! ha !—a rare jest ! Now we will reverse the picture, good Lord. I need gold ; thou givest it to me—and in abundance. Banquets, and buffoons, and dancing men and maidens, are not to be brought with empty words—yet I must have such, however costly be their price ; and embroidery, and perfumes, and rich ointments, and fine linen, must I also have—else what would Isenofra, and Eirene, and Berenice say to me ? And what would they say, if I went empty handed, with ne'er a collar for their white throats, nor a band for their raven tresses ? And Lysinoë — *thy* Lysinoë Amasis ! She would frown more heavily than she does even now—and Amun knows she frowns darkly enough whenever her eyes light upon me !—if I went not daintily attired before her footstool. And I need gold for all this ; and Amasis gives it unto me. Yea ! he gives me gold, so that I may make myself fairer

in the eyes of his own beloved ! It is true, that in the day time I live in the dark and damp, pressing out noisome poisons. But for whom--for whom?--I see a tall and haughty man; he lords it over me, and places his foot on my neck, and nigh treads out my life : and I yield, and patiently suffer rather than sting—for he is bearing me whither I would be; and *that* keeps me patient. Time wears on, and lo ! I am where I wished. And now, what can I do ? The foot presses me sore, and the whip-lash is red. What can I do ? Suffer or die ? A hard choice ! What can I do ? Slay the haughty man ? Good heart keep fast this thought ! Suffer for a brief season, to triumph for ever ! And now, O Amasis ! whose lot is fairest ?—who is the blind mygale ? Not Chebron !—not the mean slave, but the all-wise Hierophant is the fool ! Pshaw ! I have broken that other vessel ! My hand is unsteady, for that priest hath so disturbed me, I cannot work fitly. Well ! a few days more will see me at the goal of my wishes ; a few days more will give me the power of Besa, the great God of Death, himself, and I may well wait one other night.

And now to home !—and off with these soiled rags ; and with perfumes, and gay robes,

and glittering trinkets, forget myself and my daily life in the eyes of my beautiful girls of the dance and song ! Aye ! Amasis ! In me behold thy evil genius ! Thou art bold—I bolder. Thou art God-denying—I also. Thou art crafty, and yet thy life is in my power—for I am craftier still !”

And not only as the evil genius of Amasis, but as a very incarnation of the Spirit of Sin, looked the mean and wicked scribe, as he waved the lamp before his face, and peered about with his sullen, red-eyed glance.

CHAPTER III.

THE DISCIPLE'S FIRST SPIRITUAL TRIAL.—THE
OATH.—“ BEAUTIFUL LYSINOE !”

THE slow step of one lost in meditation came on the ear of Amasis, startling him from the dreamy thoughts which were weaving their moonlight nets about him, and falling harsh and heavy on senses lapped in the deliciousness of repose after the turmoil of excitement. He was turning aside with an impatient exclamation, when his name was pronounced in a very sweet, but melancholy voice. Raising his eyes, they fell on a beautiful boy, who, crossing one hand over his breast, and raising the other to his lips, made a lowly obeisance.

“ Azeth !” exclaimed the priest, “ thou here, my son !”

“ The calm beauty of the night tempted me

from the housetop," answered the youth. "I was feverish, and could not rest."

"Poor child! Thou art bewildered with the greatness of the glory about to burst on thy dazzled senses in thine approaching initiation? Why!—thy heart's unruly beat stirs thy very robe!"

"O my father it is a thought that never quits me, but day and night flows through my brain, like a trail of scorching flame! I cannot sleep—I cannot rest; like an unburied spirit do I wander over the earth, seeking for some place of rest, but seeking in vain!"

"It is, truly, much for one so young to support and understand;" replied Amasis, "but thy virtues, dear Azeth, for which the Hierophant deemed thee fitted to be so early admitted behind the mysterious veil, must now keep thee calm and still, and uphold thee through thy trial with the dignity of an Egyptian and a philosopher!"

"Virtues, father!" repeated Azeth sadly. "Oh! how ill is the heart read! That word contains the source of the bitterest grief which I know. I have so overwhelming a sense of unworthiness—so overpowering a consciousness of weakness, which stern justice must name

even sin—that I know myself to be unfit for a worthy contemplation of holy things, and still more unfit for a true insight. I am bowed to the ground with shame and despair. Ah! would that I did feel within me the pure light of virtue! My lot would then be far different to what it is now!”

“Thou art unjust to thyself,” said Amasis. “Both from thine age and mode of life, thou canst not have known much of evil.”

“Father, sin is not limited by time, nor is its stature measured by visibility. There is a deeper plague-spot lying rankling in the heart’s core, than ever is shown on the surface of action! The deadly weed of sin grows, with some natures, wide and swift—rising high and rooted fast in the same short period, and with the same scanty nurture from without, that with others cannot even mature the first birth-sown seeds. And such a plague-spot have I in my innermost soul; and such a weed has sprung up there, whose poisonous shade has blighted all else.”

Amasis looked on the boy. Could this be Azeth, the docile, child-like, pure disciple? Was this voice, so sadly mourning over secret sins, the voice of the holy candidate,

whose rare innocence had wrung applause from the stately priests themselves, and made them honor him as highly as an Egyptian could be honored? And now he spoke of evil as of a thing which he knew by experience, and boldly gainsaid the words of him—the High Priest—and refused his teaching!

Amasis, of all men, did not love this new reading; for none of the religious rulers required so much unquestioning obedience as did he. Thoughts—feelings—affections—all must he have beneath his foot, to foster or extinguish as best suited him.

“The disciple must instruct his master in the art of subtle reasoning,” he exclaimed sarcastically. “For sure none can refine further on this last absurdity of sick fancy. Thy philosophy, young son, is unlike the philosophy of the temple, which inculcates nought so strenuously as the dignity and virtue of man; making faith in its Gods, and veneration for its priests, the only needful purification from crimes, however black. But perchance thou mayst improve this easily practised doctrine with thine own peculiar theories, when thou art seated amongst the chiefs. Yet until then I counsel thee, father-like, and

with kindly intent, to close thy lips before thy superiors, and rather to seek instruction from them, than pleasure in the vain display of thine unformed thoughts. There is presumption--nay, impiety—in thus laying down doctrine and dogma when standing before the Grand Hierophant. For is he not the Revealer of Holy Things, commissioned by the Gods themselves to teach other men? Thou, of all, Azeth, I had deemed the farthest removed from irreverence—which is guilt.”

Azeth's looks fell to the ground.

“O my father,” he said. “Is it then wrong to speak out truthfully, that which is living and present to the heart? Is it worse presumption to clothe feelings and thoughts in words than to indulge them in secret?”

“Both are unlawful for the learner, Azeth. Both are faults so heinous as not to possess much gradation in wrong. They are equally to be condemned. The Disciple's main duty is silence; his highest virtue the faithful following of the wisdom of his elders.”

“Will that wisdom lead him to TRUTH, father?” whispered Azeth, in a low, almost inaudible voice; as one who gives out the dearest secret of his heart.

The priest started.

“Truth?” he said slowly. “Askest thou for truth? Dost thou know what this is? Dost thou know its black and threatening form? Has its funeral cry rung out to thy soul the world’s unceasing dirge? Azeth! beware of thy steps! Even now thou art standing on the crumbling edge of the abyss. Beware! beware! Look not down unless thou art strong; dare not to advance unless thou art brave! Cling—cling to thy foul weeds and barren rocks for support—for such stays are better than the lone wilderness of that night-black pit. Truth, wouldst thou? Child! thou art out on a deadly search! The bright gem lies glittering before thee. Thou wouldst grasp it. Ha! it is a poisoned asp! It will pierce thy hand; it will sting and destroy! Seek it not—seek it not! Rather believe the most monstrous lie which the mocking demons ever forged, than discover the fearful reality of truth!”

The voice of the priest had deepened into a wild and mournful cry, and it echoed through the sky like the wail of a ruined spirit. And his form seemed by the moon’s yellow shimmer to dilate into more than Titan Grandeur.

as, with hands raised like some warning prophet, he stood before the young boy, uttering the dread oracle of his heart's despair.

What had he to do with truth or spiritual life—what with spiritual joy and beauty—when to him the soul and its perceptions were but phantoms, and existence but a curious mechanism?—when neither the incorporate Gods of the adyta, nor the disembodied and untypified EICTON, had, for him, place or being, but in the imaginations of enthusiasts and the fears of superstitious cowards.

“O Amasis!” exclaimed Azeth fervently. “All is not well with thy noble heart; else thou couldst never have said those fearful words! Truth cannot slay or sting. The searching for it may, indeed, bring forth many a snaky-eyed lie, which, for their brilliancy the unwary may at first cherish as priceless gems—hereafter to sting the breast that cradles them; but the truth...the THING THAT IS—the one and unperishable—must give life, and a glorious guiding light.”

“My son! fair child! how soon will thy tender heart be torn, and thy steps fail under the breaking of thy fragile staff!” cried Amasis in a tone of pity.

For an instant the thought of the misery, which the boy would know hereafter, had startled him from his coldness.

“Pardon thy son,” continued Azeth in the same fervent strain. “Pardon his boldness, it his lips speak of that which his soul knoweth not! Yet from earliest youth, until now, I have longed for the knowledge of this truth. Painfully and wearily; ever doubting between two paths—ever within me the ceaseless conflict of two natures; but faithfully and in sincerity, have I searched for my treasure. Earth calls loudly to me through sense. The visible beauty of nature—the warm loveliness of sentient life—seem to me at times the only realities; the things to which I should do well to cling, turning from all else as from dreams, and shadows, and vapour-woven visions. But again in stillness—in the silent night—Heaven whispers to me, and its angels seem to hover round; and I hear their songs saying to me, that this our present life is the UNREAL; and that its pleasures and pursuits are all too coarse and rough for the pure soul’s delicate love: that even in physical creation the true life and the true beauty are not the mere outward features of the form, but the spirit that lies shrouded

within. Oh! it is a fierce warfare! Would to Heaven it were ended, though even in the cold tomb!"

"Thou art undergoing that which all men undergo in the first stage of their Thinking Life," replied the Priest. "There is in the breasts of all an unending conflict between these Two Natures. And by our constitution it must be so. Our number is Two: our souls are dually governed; and the world's question will ever be: which shall I serve? to which shall I consecrate myself--to the Body or the Spirit? to privation called virtue, or to the indulgence of natural instincts and propensities, which religion mysteriously names vice? In youth's hour of glowing passion, to the latter: in the calmness of age, to the former. And both obey the Laws of Nature in thus devoting themselves! Is this thine only doubt? thine only warfare? Foolish boy! Thou has disturbed a sand-hill, and shriekest out that the universe is shaken. In after-years, when Thought shall have become to thee, what it is to many—a fierce monster that goads to madness, unless thou art strong, and canst subdue it under thee; when Passion shall have died, and left thee without an ex-

cuse for thy sorrow ; then wilt thou look back to these puny troubles, and sigh for the serenity which such could disturb ! Obey thy natural impulses. *Live* in thy young life ; and waste it not in pale-eyed musings, and cold thought. Use thy passions...obey thy impulses...drink deep of the cup of joy...thou wert formed for this by nature. Leave to age the chilliness of self-control ; but heap up round thy bed of youth the lilies of delight. And for thy religion—venerate the priests as the visible, incarnate Gods. This is all that the *Ædes* demands. In acting thus thou wilt be acting more wisely than in striving to unite the wisdom of maturity with the passionateness of green boyhood. Follow Nature, and obey her commands, and surely thou must do right and well.”

Was the Pontiff of the Theban Amun speaking out the thoughts of his soul—or was he but tempting the boy’s virtue, and making trial of his holiness ?

“ Ah, my father ! ” cried Azeth, terrified, “ thou hast mistaken me. I should be, in truth, utterly wretched were I to live according to the suggestions of passion and pleasure ! But this is not all my sorrow. For when this

contest is over, and earth loosens her hold, and the Infinite and Eternal make up the grand whole—when the Unseen is the nearest and truest—then comes the darker question: how is this trust in the heavenly, to be brought out into action? How is the truth of its existence to be made manifest? What revelation or symbol, is the fit interpreter of its mysteries? Amasis! can these mysteries be typified without being likewise degraded? Can they be set before men, within the circle of their sight, and not be dwarfed and maimed?"

"What says the Temple? What say its doctrines?" asked Amasis, with a sharp glance. "Surely, thou believest these? I scarce can understand thy question! The Gods of Egypt are not only within the circle of man's sight—but they are placed so far below it, that he has to stoop—to bow his proud humanity—to grovel on the ground—before he can behold them. Explain thyself further: for my senses are too dull to understand, by inspiration alone. What dost thou mean?"

Azeth pressed his hands over his eyes, then said in hurried accents, but so low that the priest had to stoop that he might hear them:

“ An impious thought—one that I dread to say out, even to the silent air—one that rises before me like some black-robed fiend—now grinning and mocking, now solemn and warning—a thought that makes the blood clot through my veins, and seems to loosen the foundations of the earth—father. is the Temple’s worship—is it the whole of truth, and are its doctrines to be literally believed? This demon I have striven hard to conquer; but I may not—I may not! Do I strike it down with the weapon of trust in my superiors, and fear at my own judgment?—a little way off—and lo! it starts up again, the same—the same—and unconquerable! I cannot overcome! I am weak and faint, and I bleed. Father! I am unaided by all; for to men I dare not reveal this corruption of my soul, and the just gods have forgotten me! They have forsaken me in wrath, and left me to perish and to die! Father! Priest! Interpreter of Heaven! succour me before I am lost!”

And over the boy’s death-pale cheek flowed large tears that fell heavily on the pavement below.

Oh! the most fearful hour—the most deadly agony of life is that, when the child-honored

faith looks FALSE; when the glorious immortality—the everlasting heaven once so bright and near—is darkened and unattainable; and the guiding light put out, there is none other to show the right way !

Amasis smiled. He who had dared boldly to confront the appalling Shape of Denial, without a pulse quickened or a nerve shaken, had but scant sympathy with the young boy for this evil, which, to him, appeared so light. For a thinking man to doubt the reality of the gods of the temple, as they were shown to the herd, was, in his sight, as necessary as to doubt the substantiality of that Temple's shadow on the ground. He beheld Azeth's spiritual agonies and upbraidings with wonder, but also with scorn. Ah! the proud, self-sustaining priest had never loved good nor the gods so well, that to part from them was pain to him! There are many such; and their fellow-men name them lofty, and grand, and they pay them honors as to the very gods of brave Independence. But before high Heaven—how show they then?

Amasis turned to the disciple, and looking at him so long and fixedly, that the boy's blood rushed over his brow, he answered,

“Our faith is, surely, sufficiently definite to satisfy the most exacting sceptic! In one place, behold the Holy Ox: kneel to him. Is he not a god? In another, thou dost incur the deadly peril of crushing one of the deities incarnate in a sightless mygale, or glittering scarabæus, or sick ibis, or crawling viper, or various small insects and animals, which—we should call it stupidity in unsainted beasts, but proofs of divinity in holy ones—creep under thy steps as thou treadest. Thou must take heed of thy ways! Thou wilt never be led into the presence of the Dread Unnameable, to the foot of his lotus-borne throne, if one of these dies by thy deed, how unintentional soever was the act; for the gods are strict reckoners! Dost thou question these facts? Think; the great beings who conjointly once made, and now rule the earth and stars, dwell here in their own creation; not in the persons of men—the highest of earth’s creatures—but in the forms of reptiles and beasts—the lowest. There can be no difficulty in believing this? I see what thou wouldst say, ‘marvellous condescension!’ So is thy existence, child! If, as the Temple says, thy soul is a Divine Emanation, thou art but a different impersonation of the

Brute-soul. Thou livest: and dost thou not see these gods likewise eat, drink, and die? And does not the doctrine of the *Ædes* declare, that life itself is a conclusive proof of divinity? Thou wouldst then know why the particular life of these certain incarnations should contain so much more divinity than the rest? Thou must ask long before thou art answered otherwise than by the word: 'Thus it is!' Thus must thou worship—thus must thou believe. Superiority is oft-times eccentric. How dost thou know, but that the gods have this peculiarity too? Canst thou not rest content with naming this brute godship, an eccentricity of heaven?"

"Father! father! thou art mocking me!" cried Azeth, in a voice of anguish. "Thou art pouring fire into my heart and veins. It is scorching me!"

"Yet," continued Amasis, in the same unmoved tone. "Thou still hast the power of rejecting this evidence of thy senses. But remember! it is an impious thing to listen to the words of reason, when these contradict the words of the *Adytum*! Yet still mayst thou reject, at least, in secret, though thou art compelled by law to conform in public,

But weigh thy determination well and carefully, for much depends on each man's choice. Think of thy poor soul! Perhaps, divine particle as it is, it will return to the earth as an unclean, rooting swine. Thy Typhonian metempsychosis will have one blessing though--thou wilt not be eaten by thine Egyptian brethren; and wrong from a foreign hand, is less sharp than that from a trusted. Or, as a foul night-bird, or labour-laden steer bleeding beneath the lash of the vile herdsman, and dumbly struggling for utterance in its debased casket, wilt thou revisit this glorious earth. And this belief must thou cherish, that thou mayst be kept in the way of virtue. Now reconcile this faith with the Divine Emanation, and the dogma of the godship of Life! I grant thee, it is not in the power of Reason to unite these contradictions; but then they are mysteries beyond the grasp of man's understanding because above it. Who would dare to whisper, because *below* it? Ha!"

Azeth hid his face in his hands, but made no answer; unless the shudder that ran through his whole frame might be deemed such. And in truth, it was an answer; and one sadly eloquent!

“My son, look on the skies above; look on the earth around thee. Tell me, do they not re-echo the truths taught within the temenos? Do not they testify to the reality of our religion?”

“Not unto me, holy father!” said Azeth speaking with difficulty, “to me they have other and strange words!”

“Aye?—and yet tell me why animal and insect should not be gods? As thou canst not disprove, why not believe?—why not refrain from examination, and converse with thy reason, as this is unfavorable, and that is contrary, to thy religion? Thou art unwise! Accept wholly; or, Azeth—” and here the priest sunk his voice to the lowest whisper, “reject wholly; but try not to piece thy faith and thine understanding into one garment. This is beyond thy skill.”

“Reject wholly—and turn to what?” asked the disciple mournfully, “I sicken at the dark answer! And yet were my lips to frame themselves to utter these words, ‘I believe in the gods of the Temple,’ they could not give out a living sound. There is an opposing force within me that will not let me free!”

“And thou art preparing for thine initia-

tion into the great mysteries, in this temper and with these doubts?—and thou hast enrolled thyself as a candidate to serve that which thou deemest false? Is this thy boasted love of truth,—this thy hatred of falsehood? Ha! which will be noblest?—the poor horned snake rearing its crested head on the sacred cushion, and worshipped as the incarnation of the mighty Amun, or thou, the worshipper and minister, despising and denying as thou kneelest? The one is a venomous, creeping reptile; the other an upright-walking, heavenward-looking man. But methinks the scale of worth will weigh lightest with the proudest! Not thus oughtest thou to act, Azeth! Hadst thou indeed been from childhood,” he added hastily, as if a sudden reflection had flashed across his mind, “consecrated by thy Hermesian brethren to the service of the *Ædes*—and, in after days hadst thus doubted—then mightst thou have pleaded in excuse, the necessity of keeping the faith of the multitude unshaken, and their confidence in the priests intact. But that any man should voluntarily enter upon a service which he believes to be false, betokens either folly or crime!”

“I offer myself as a candidate to serve the

which I fear is false for this reason," returned Azeth, patiently, "I have ever been taught to believe, that the true meaning of what is elsewhere inexplicable, and contradictory to all our inner sense of truth, lies behind the Veil of Shadowing; and that when once admitted within the sanctuary, I shall then see rightly the glorious substances of these dark shadows!"

"Shadows!" repeated the priest, "thou speakest strange words! How dost thou dare to name them shadows?"

"Oh! they are not realities, as they stand before the herd?" exclaimed the boy, folding his hands entreatingly. "But pardon me, holy father!—pardon me holy priest!" he added, suddenly drawing back, "I have forgotten myself and my place; and, by bold speech, have given shape to that which ought for ever to have remained a mere vague and formless idea. I have sinned doubly! Blot out from thy memory all that I have said this night; and pity, but do not condemn to the utmost, the ignorance which has led me so far astray. Thou, the wisest and best, be not angry with thy servant—with thy weary, footsore son!"

"This is well!" said Amasis, "Tears of repentance are pure and bright, and lovely

in the sight of Amun and the Queen of Heaven. Cheer thee, Azeth, young son!—thy task will soon be over; and soon a new world will burst upon thy sight with glories to refresh thee after thy brief warfare. Thou hast much to learn. Things from which, at first, it may be, thou wilt turn away in terror,—realities, uncomely to look upon, but not the less real and needful to be known by the sage,—must be set before thee. Thou wilt lack a guide through this new world. I will be that guide; for I love thee. Thy ready spirit and inquiring mind first drew me unto thee, and made me single thee from amongst the other disciples, as the one most worthy the high honor of initiation. But thou, in return, must yield thyself wholly unto me, and trust thyself without reserve to my hand. I will shew thee much. I will reveal countries which as yet thou knowest not. Foreign but lovely countries, where music, and odour, and light, weave the soul's garment,—clothing it in bliss. And love, too, is there, O Azeth! Why dost thou start? I said love—true! but a spiritual love, boy,—a passionless love. For the perfect priest may not have an earthly flame to burn in his pure heart. Yet say, is

thy nature so cold, that thou wouldst turn from the warm breath of the deity visible as woman? Wouldst thou flee from the loving eyes—aye, even the kisses—of the bright genii of bliss, Heaven's angels?"

The young disciple's breath came short and quick. "Can this be?" he exclaimed passionately, "can indeed the beautiful spirits come incorporate before men? O Amasis! say those words again! say them—clear—clear, and with truth!"

Amasis laid his head on the youth's shoulder. "Listen," he said, speaking slowly and distinctly, "for the faithful and trusting, the Temple has every joy and every delight. Its priests renounce earth, only to enter, while living, into the blest abode. Mark! this is for the faithful and trusting alone. The doubter of the Hierophants is cast into a pit of coldness and darkness, through which gleams not one ray of light. Alike cut off from the earth and the empyræan, his life is but an entombed animation. Be thou wise, and of the former. Trust in me, and perchance even our great Maut will reveal herself, at *my* prayers, to her brother—consort's worshipper. And then, holding the soft, glowing hand extended to

thee, and encircling the pliant form, thou wouldst draw wisdom from her tender glance, and inspiration from the breath of her kiss. In after days, if thou dost purify thy soul, and accumulate knowledge, and become one of the wise of Egypt,—thou mayst thyself draw down from their thrones the angels of the stars, to love thee, and to be thine own !”

Azeth turned away troubled. Those fierce unflinching eyes, with fascination to hurt, and allurements to ruin, made him shrink and tremble at their gaze. He looked upon the deep blue sky. Thousands and thousands of stars were shining there, with their bright smiles, and whispered harmonies—sending out messages of comfort to the sorrowful, and messages of love to the desolate. A mysterious feeling had ever possessed Azeth, as of an intimate knowledge of those glorious spheres. And oft in the midnight hours, shadowy forms floated down to him, and shadowy voices sounded to him from out their countless host. One above all—one, fairest, gentlest, best ! Ah ! would that he had never turned from this spiritual teaching ! Would that he had ever trusted to the interpretation of his own soul, and rejected each other ! But all

was so indistinct and impalpable, that in the crowd and glare of the day, he would deem these glorious visitants mere bright-winged thoughts which had flitted across his mind, and taken shape from the delusions of a heated phantasy. Looking for the embodiment of their blissful anticipations among the daughters of men, he had set before himself the love which is known and felt here for them, as the great blessedness of life. This belief in the power of passion was the stronger, as the reality of that passion was unknown to him. Use had not tarnished, nor disappointment faded, its brightness. As yet the world of love was the charmed, flowery plain, which it ever is to the young ; and he dreamt not that within those flower-cups lay blight and poison.

To him, therefore, the temptation of Amasis came laden with the mightiest allurements. The Divine Spirit, incarnate as woman—guiding him—loving him—teaching him ; his brain grew giddy ! Here then was a shrine before which he might kneel, and offer up all that his nature contained—worship—reverence—adoration—trust—love—in one full censer of bliss ! And yet the priest's words were fraught with another spirit than that of holi-

ness ; and spoke of another feeling than the pure worship of the gods !

The boy looked up on the starry heavens, and they seemed to whisper to him very faint and low, but audibly, " Trust not the priest ! His words though sweet, are the nets of Death !"

But the one was palpable, the other merely spiritual. And sense weaves a stronger bond for the soul than can the immaterial !

Amasis read his thoughts, and instantly changed his tone and manner into one more befitting the saintly guide.

" I see what is passing in thy mind, dear Azeth," he began very gently, and with almost sadness. " I see that thy heart is shrinking from thy teacher with dread and horror at his words. I was wrong. I confess it ; for I spoke to the uncleansed, as I should have spoken only to the purified spirit. The language of humanity can produce but earthly images, to the gross and dim-eyed, palpable and sensuous—to the enlightened, spiritual and passionless. In picturing celestial delights, words painting carnal pleasures must perforce be used. These are all we know. And from what we see and feel, can we alone draw language and symbols. Those who attempt

a supernatural phraseology for supernatural things, but fall into the deep pit of folly. Thou canst not deify man, nor make his understanding infinite, and capable of grasping infinity. Into the small and broken cup thou canst not gather all the waters of the ocean, nor enclose the whole surrounding air in the fowler's net. And yet farther; to this language, which has so much shocked thee, because I, as man, spoke manlike, and not God-like, belong two meanings: one, the hidden, for the pure; the other, the audible, for the impure. Blame not me that thou art of the latter! Blame not me that the secret accents are unheard by thee, and that thou knowest only the sensual! When I spoke to thee, I believed that it was to one whom the gods had deigned to enlighten; at the least, so far that their interpreter might be understood! I did not know that thou wert a stranger to them, and deaf to their words. Henceforth I shall converse with thee as with any other of the ignorant herd; nor startle thy foolish soul again with the misinterpreted words of wisdom."

The warning voice in Azeth's breast was forgotten. His distrust was subdued, and merged into shame for his backwardness.

“ O father ! teach me this heavenly language ! Lead me to its truth ! I have voyaged long over a dark sea, with none to guide or cheer me—through a pathless sea—tossed about by every wind and tempest. Father ! end this ! I flee to thee for guidance. In the perfectness of an Understood Worship I look for peace ; through the support of a Definite Faith, I seek for aid. My heart aches, O Amasis ! and would fain rest.”

“ And it shall sleep and rest,” answered Amasis, his rich voice ringing through the air like lofty music. “ Joy thee in thy resolve, for I will grant thee this peace ! Here, under Heaven’s eternal arch—the stars above our only witnesses—swear to place thy soul unreservedly in my keeping ! I will guide thee to Truth—to reality. Thy wanderings shall cease, and thy pains be lulled. On the safe shore thou shalt rest and repose ; on the strong mountain thou shalt stand, and behold. Thou shalt see the forms of things which are hidden from thee now, and shalt know the worth or meanness of those which thou already viewest. Swear, and this life is thine !”

Awestruck, bewildered, subdued, Azeth knelt.

“ I swear it !” he said. And it echoed

mournfully, this oath of the free spirit binding itself to slavery !

And the stars looked paler, and very far off.

Then Amasis folded his arms, and looked down in triumph on the kneeling boy. And his proud, dark form towered above him, like a ruined angel—beautiful and glorious even in its ruin.

“Now thou art mine !” he said ; then strode haughtily away.

But Azeth still knelt in his place, and from dread and weariness wept long and bitterly. The haven of rest---ah ! it was a dungeon ! The soft, friendly bosom whereon to cradle his weary head---chains !---chains !---binding round his brow, and eating into his heart ! And it will be ever thus with the faithful, over whom the stronger Falsehood reigns.

And the Form, which, from his earliest, unremembered childhood, had hovered like a loving, sainted mother about the boy's path—that radiant form with golden hair, and wings of light and glory, whose melodies he heard when his soul was clearest, and looked the deepest into holy things—her white garments

he now saw shining far off—but she, herself, the beautiful, was faded and indistinct, and hung sadly drooping in the dark air. And Azeth knew that all was not well; that the plague had come. But where?

Amasis looked round, and when he saw the fair boy cowering on the ground, crushed and broken of heart, a feeling of pity came across him to redeem his title to manhood.

“It is sad!” he said musing. “Sad, but necessary—painful but inevitable! This term of trial is what each must pass through, before he can arrive at a philosophy purged from the gross errors and superstitions of men. I, myself even, am not wholly free from the taint of human weakness. How then should he, a child, have been able to rise higher in his short time, than the thought-devoted man? I am not free from the taint human weakness, in truth! Lysinoë! too well dost thou know that! Thou, who hast snared my heart in the tangled web of thy proud graces—too dearly for my peace hast thou proved my impotence! Beautiful Lysinoë! Best and dearest! Oh! when will thy love light on me? Cruel and cold, thou art heedless of my anguish, and careless of my sorrow. Oh!

turn to me, and love me—for thou art my star and my God !”

And as he went on his way in the delirium of passion his victim lay on the earth, forgotten.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KING'S DAUGHTER. THE FATHER. LOVE TOO
HIGHLY SET. LOVE TOO SADLY BORN

NITOCRIS, the daughter of Sethos the Pontiff-King, sat in her chamber in the royal palace at Memphis, heavy, and sad of heart ; her mournful eyes, so large and dark, were often filled with large tears, and her sweet lips were pale and parched. There was an air of deep grief about her ; but grief that was repressed by even more than woman's natural dignity. That noble maiden, with her queenly soul and lofty bearing, was not one to yield to the dominion of passion ! For had she bowed her royal heart to coward weakness or burning ardors, it would have been a shame to

the calm dignity of the Egyptian, which forbade all outward show of violent emotion : commanding, that though the wild beast of passion might gnaw even to the heart's core, it should not force a cry or tear. Yet with the women of such nations—the soft, tender women, to whom nature in all lands, and in all ranks, has given feeling mightier than strength, and impulse greater than wisdom, and with whom the expression of such feeling, and obedience to such impulse is a necessity—this education taught by dignity holds an endless and painful war. Much as teaching and habit can, and do effect, they may not wholly govern ; and in spite of their iron grasp, the wrung soul will struggle, and the wounded heart shriek, striving after freedom, and crying aloud for support.

The sadness of Nitocris was the more touching, as it was borne with that gentle pride which studiously suppressed, rather than displayed her sorrows. Touching is indeed, the sadness of all things young and beautiful, for whom life should have nought but one loud song of joy ! Oh ! it is a weary thing to see the fresh heart fade, ere Time has swept over it his frozen winds ! to see the young bud

scarce blown in the early dawn, fall shattered beneath the rude touch, or lie trampled under the careless tread ! Better, far, that the beloved child should calmly sleep in her cold grave, than broken and tarnished lie in the dust, asking in vain for a rest and peace which are not. But the sorrow of Nitocris, while it lent her greater beauty from its softness, seemed of that pure kind, which saddens, but does not wither the heart.

At the further end of the long intercolumned room,—removed out of hearing, though not out of sight,—were the hand-maids of the Princess, all talking among themselves in those low, laughing whispers which young, light-hearted maidens use when they gather together to descant upon the mysteries of their dress, or the respective perfections of their lovers. Most of these bright girls were employed in weaving long shawls, or smaller napkins of delicate muslin, whose borders were composed of blue stripes, fringed at the edge ; and through some, gold and silver threads were run, forming patterns of flowers or scrolls, or even of the workwoman's own favorite bird, or pet gazelle, or loved goat. And merrily the work went on, with many a jest, and laugh, and

tale, to beguile the lagging hours. And when these failed, the lute and the pipe, and the graceful dance, and the sweet love song, effectually scared away the demon of gloom, and made even the sad Nitocris smile with her own sweet, grave smile at seeing such young laughing joys about. A smile and a sigh, following each other so swiftly that they seemed twin-born !

Close by the side of the king's daughter sat a companion more favored than the rest, Taia, her foster-sister and childhood's playmate. She was likewise engaged in weaving; but her materials and implements were all more costly than those of the other fair workers. Her tall, vase-shaped basket stood by her, piled up with the finest and whitest threads, through which shone gold and silver threads, and her distaff was of ivory, beautifully formed and carved, but lacking the bright gems which adorned the same instrument belonging to her mistress. And busily the handmaid plied at her work, with her laughing face lit up by its merry eyes that danced with irrepressible gaiety, and her rounded cheeks broken into a perfect world of dimples, like a lake that the west wind kisses. Taia had suffered little from

the education of dignity; and little had she heeded the words of the step-dame, custom! For, from the smooth, cup-formed forehead, with its thin black brows arched over a pair of sly, almond-shaped orbs, down to the small foot shod in its pretty sandal, she had but one expression of mirth and nature. In her eyes—round her pouting lips with their wicked smiles—lurking in the dimples on her warm, downy cheeks—peeping out in every curve and line—were joyfulness and glee. You might have fancied her some young bird just caged, trilling out its gladness, while yet the golden bars had beauty, and the false freedom sufficiency for it. A striking contrast was the childlike merriment of the tire-maid to the tender gravity of the king's daughter. The stately Nile queen--the moon-beloved lotus--and the dancing bud of the sweet acacia tree, were not less alike than were these two maidens!

With tales and songs Taia had vainly endeavoured to cheer her young mistress. But powerful in soothing and sweet influence, as these ever were to one whose whole soul was a very melody of beauty, to-day they could call forth nothing, save the faint but kindly smile, which stole over the face of Nitocris like the

sun's rays over a marble statue; illumination but not from the heart; light passing over the lip, but not raying out from the eye. Watching this determined melancholy, Taia herself grew as sorrowful as it was in her nature to be; and laying down her distaff, she crossed her taper hands over her bosom, and said, looking up anxiously at the Princess:

“Tell me why thou art so sad, sweet lady. Why is thy brow troubled as the waters of the river when the winged Sphynx is abroad?—and why are thine eyes mournful as the eyes of a young dove, whose mate is fluttering with broken wing through the trees? What has caused thee such sorrow? Oh! pardon my boldness; but I have seen this sadness and kept silence too long.”

Nitocris bent her head over her work, till the heavy mass of glossy plaits, hanging like a raven's glistening wing, shaded all her cheek and brow with its dusky veil.

“Nought to speak of my good Taia!” she answered gently. “As over even our bright heaven light shadows flit which veil its splendour for a time, so over our heart's heaven pass clouds, which yet bode neither storm nor tempest.”

Taia shook her head.

"I have seen such," she cried, "but thy present gloom is not from them! A deeper shade is here cast than ever the fleece-cloud threw. Well! thou wilt not reveal its cause. Thou wert always the same. Even in the days of open-voiced childhood thou didst ever shut up thy soul from all around thee. Yet I would fain know the cause of thy grief! Woman to woman—overleaping for one short moment the gulf which rank has graved between us—surely thou mightest speak thy thoughts to me!"

"Dear maiden, cease this;" said Nitocris. "Thou art too watchful of the slight changes of the moment. Trust me, Taia, silence is fittest for the heart's emotion. It is the fittest for trivial sorrows; because by speech they but gain a weight and place which they deserve not: and oh! far fittest for deeper griefs, which are too sacred to be desecrated by words! To which of these my sadness may belong, it is alike needful for me to bear it in silence."

"As thou wilt, lady!" answered Taia with the petulant displeasure of an over-indulged favorite. "There was a time," she continued,

muttering to herself, and pettishly turning away, "when the heart of Nitocris, the priest's daughter, and Taia, the simple craftman's child were one; and when confidence and love were between them. But alas! in womanhood, unequal state quickly unlooses the firmest bond of childish friendships, and makes the affection of the lower a thing to be spurned and despised. Soon we shall be nought nearer than the high-born maiden, Egypt's sole Princess, and the humble tire-woman, meanest of her slaves! And thus will end the dearest love of Taia's life!" And bright drops, more of anger than of sorrow, stole down from her glancing eyes to kiss her rosy lips.

"Thou art angry, Taia! and angry, too, without a cause. I fear much thou art over fondled, girl, for thou trenchest hard upon my place! Nay, weep not for so very a trifle—else art thou no foster-sister of mine. Thou dost slander me, in saying that added rank has lessened my attachment to thee. As child, and as princess, I love thee alike. But thou wouldst not have the woman manifest her love in the same manner as did the infant? Thou wouldst not prize the affection that was shown by baby kiss, and baby plays; that proved its existence

by babbling outpourings of every passing feeling? I do not wish to grieve thee: but neither do I wish to fail in my honor and dignity. And these I deem lost in exposure of the heart's thoughts."

"Not to a friend...not to one that loves thee," exclaimed Taia, hastily. There is not ...cannot be...any disgrace with love. What is love but the union of two natures...the harmony of two souls? There cannot be dishonor in aught that gratifies affection...in aught that affection teaches!"

"Thinkest thou? Then thou art wrong dearest maid! No woman of the Pure Land ought to think thus. There is foul disgrace, not only in revealing our feelings, even to the nearest friend, but also in hidden indulgence of them. Every true maiden ought to strive her life long for Calmness and Control: else in what are we better than the Gentiles around? How otherwise shall we merit the protection and respect of our noble fathers and brothers? And surely the women of our nation should be both equal to, and worthy of, their Lords."

"It is doubtless a high ^{saying} ~~saying~~, Lady," returned Taia: "but it is one to which I can-

not assent. It may be right for thee, the proudly placed, to feel proud things, but surely the humbler may be allowed to follow the guidance of nature rather than of custom. And nature, who bids the bird to sing and the babe to smile, never meant the woman to live in a desert-cave of silent pride. If it be wrong to indulge in the expression of feeling, why have we the desire to sin?"

And Taia looked up, ignorant that she had asked the unanswerable question of life.

"All would, of themselves, willingly follow such guidance, dear sister," returned Nitocris sadly and gravely. "Thou canst not believe that there is Pleasure in tearing asunder the living cords cast over us at our birth? Thou canst not believe that there is Delight in pressing back the rushing torrent, to spread ruin and desolation in its pent place, rather than escape through the channels of speech and action—escape, and bless and fertilise?" Tears gushed into the maiden's eyes, as she pronounced these words.

"Then why thus torture the heart?" cried Taia, vehemently. "This constraint *must* be evil, if its effects are so fearful."

"Hush! hush! thou thoughtless child!"

said Nitocris. "Thou knowest not what thou art saying. The Great Gods would not look kindly on one under the dominion of unchecked Nature. The boast of our land, is, its advancement in all arts and all knowledge; its clear way of light running like a silver thread through the darkness of the barbarous countries around. Thou wouldst not place thyself below bricks and stones? See! on these, with patient care and labour, are sculptured signs and figures foreign to them, but of deep import, and giving them worth and beauty: and they are cast into shapes and forms, into which earth never fashioned them in the mould of her mighty bosom. Yet are they not lovelier when they leave the sculptor's hand, than when they were newly hewn from the shapeless rock? So with us."

"Dearest Lady," answered Taia, awed by the impressive tone and manner of the Princess. "Thou hast been taught by thy father, the best learned in Egypt, and by Amenophis the gifted Priest, and art thyself wise beyond all maidens. I, a poor, ignorant child of the dust, may not dare to gainsay thy words, for thou seest deeper than I. All that I can do, is to lament my own ignorance, which hinders

me from being the worthy companion of thy hours."

"All are worthy, sweet sister, and equal also, to whom Thoth, the Wise and Great, grants willingness for improvement. This is the great lesson which we all have to learn in our life; and they are best, who study it the most heartily, and practise it the most diligently. The Gods make no other distinction among men than this. I say all; but thou knowest that I do not include the Sacred Order; of which we may not dare to speak so lightly."

"Thou art right in thy instruction, and wise in thy limitation, my child," said a grave, stern voice, and Sethos, the Pontiff King, came forward. Nitocris instantly rose from her place, and held forth her hands, with a sweet mixture of dignity, reverence, and love in her manner, while she bent low before her father. Sethos took her hands in his, and slightly pressed them to his lips. His manner was courteous though so stern.

"Thy will, my father?" asked Nitocris, again bending.

"I must speak with thee alone," he answered, leading her aside.

Taia made a lowly reverence, and withdrew to the other end of the chamber, where the merry weaving-maids were now clustering together, hushing their childlike prattle to the subdued tones of fear, as they furtively glanced at the king. The unchanging gravity of the monarch, independent of the respect due to him both as King and Priest, was severe enough to quench the mirth of a hundred such light-winged hearts as theirs.

There was silence for some time between the father and his child. They were both standing side by side; the impersonations of two of the best virtues of their time...Earnestness and Dignity. He, with his firm, erect bearing, his stern justice, his thoughtfulness, and his utter want of frivolity, was the very ideal of Egyptian piety as shown in the Priest. His thin, close lips could scarce have relaxed into a smile; the deep furrows on his brow, graved by incessant care and meditation, could scarce have been lost in the wrinkles of jocund mirth. Little had the criminal to expect from his mercy; little the unthinking from his indulgence. He was an austere man, and one that could sympathise only with the

striving. With the light and vain he had nothing in common. He was a fit type of a large portion of his order, which comprised two distinct classes. The one to which the king belonged, was the contemplative; apparently the highest, but in reality, the lower grade; for the active priest alone had the direction of the machinery by which men were governed, while the contemplative, managed by the same puppet-strings as those which controlled the herd, saw in the oracles and omens and celestial visitations the same mystery, and the same worth, as did the people.

And Nitocris, how majestically beautiful she looked! How grand and queenly, but still how feminine and delicate! She, also, was a true Egyptian in the pride of self-reliance, the gravity of earnestness, and the massiveness of grandeur, which made up the finest portion of the character of the children of Khem. Her self-control, too, made her only the more beautiful; yet naturally more loving than cold, it had only been by continued discipline that she had been able to school herself to her present appearance of calmness. But the warm life of tenderness within was not chilled; its expression only was checked; and those who

needed all the cares and fond attentions of the most ardent nature would find them with her, while they looked in vain for causeless caress, and incessant love-prattle, offered with no deeper feeling than that prompted by the superficial fondness of the moment. The palm-tree has a deeper root than the flowery weed ; yet the leaves of the one are not worn in the breasts of the thoughtless, where the buds of the other are withering. But heroes and conquerors make themselves crowns from the brave tree, while they trample the weed carelessly under foot.

A glossy length of hair fell in numerous plaits over the neck of Nitocris ; with chains of gold, and large beads of emeralds and amethysts strung in loops, and small bands of seed pearls, twined amongst them. Upon her forehead was set the regal asp—a fitting fillet for the jetty luxuriance which it confined. In the folds of this royal diadem bloomed a white lotus flower, whose hue contrasted well with the deep sable of her long tresses. Her richly worked vest was closed to the throat, and there fastened with a gem, whose price was near a king's ransom. On her graceful arms glittered bracelets of that lithe, pure

gold which fastens without hook or clasp, from its own flexibility alone ; some had small bells hanging loosely from them, while others were merely broad bands, plainly worked. Her dark blue dress, shaded by the gauzy veil of her white upper garment, of the so much renowned "woven air," hung on her tall and finely moulded form in graceful folds, and its heaven-like hue accorded well with the seeming of its wearer : from beneath the fringed hem glanced her light feet, with their polished ankles covered with a network of party-coloured laces, securing her gorgeous sandal that glittered with gold and silver wire. Her large eyes, black as night and bright as the stars of the sky, looked out from their long lashes like young flowers half hidden by their leaves ; the lids were tinged with the black powder which was in use among the daughters of Khemi, and which added a greater lustre to their beauty. It lent a languishing expression, which belonged to the gentle melancholy of her nature, while it deepened the shade which the thick fringes cast on her pale cheek.

If Nitocris were gently sad, she was not inertly so. The great mysteries of life—the presence

and the necessity of evil—the obscurity of the future—the mystic remembrance of a former being—the inexplicable contradictions of the Temple, yet the overpowering reverence demanded by its gods and its doctrines; all these deep thoughts which have for ever harassed the minds of those who reflect, be their faith what it may, had left on Nitocris the unfailing marks of their presence—a melancholy whose cause was hidden even from herself. This was the origin of her usual sadness; but now, there were evidently other and deeper griefs preying upon her soul—griefs of life, not only of thought; sorrows of the heart, not only of the mind.

Sethos drew her nearer to him.

“Nitocris,” he began solemnly, “thou art not like the daughters of most men; thou art something better—something nobler, and braver, too, than they. Thou art not one to tremble like a date-leaf in the blast of the simoon. If thou knewest that peril stood on the path of manliness and virtue, thou wouldst still bid the traveller journey forward, and confront and subdue the foe. Such an hour of peril has now arrived for me. Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, has come down

against Pelusium with a strong and mighty army, numbering many thousands more than I could bring into the field, though the soldiery and nobles were even to join my standard. But—”

“ *Were they to join, father !*” interrupted the maiden, “ surely—surely there lies no doubt in this ! Would any Egyptian hesitate to dare his bravest for his birth-land ? Thy pardon, holy father, for this unseemly interruption ! Thy speech put to flight thy daughter’s courtesy and reverence !”

“ Nay, never blush, dear child,” replied Sethos kindly. “ Thy father can well forgive so sweet an offence ! Would that hesitation were all that my people showed ! Would that backwardness were the worst feeling of their hearts ! Thou, in thy safe place—exposed to none of the passions—none of the temptations of life—can scarce know the influence which evil holds over men. Listen ! I have but just now come from an assembly of all the warriors in Memphis, to whom I set forth our common danger, whilst I urged them to do their best to avert it. In vain ! Fired by anger against me for the strong hand which I have laid on their blood-stained order and its

unholy privileges, they have deserted me now in my hour of need. With one voice they refused to march to Pelusium, or to strike a blow in defence of their homes. 'Let the Assyrian come!' they cried, 'he will not harm us so much as our king hath done! Let the robber plunder, and the victorious soldier sack our land; they cannot ruin men who crawl on the earth in meaner plight than that of the meanest beggar! Thou, Sethos, art a deadlier foe than Sennacherib; and we will gladly exchange thy double crown for his sword.' Like a cloud of locusts the Assyrians have settled upon the fertile plains, devouring and devastating; and the people cry aloud to me for protection and assistance. My subjects are turned rebels, and plot against me here, in my very home—my regal palace. Tirhakah, King of Ethiopia, is now on his way to the devoted city, doubtless to aid Sennacherib. Ally have I none, save the Gods in heaven!"

"And they will shield and assist thee," said Nitocris in a low voice. "My brave—my noble father, they will not desert thee."

"I have seen the face of Pntha," returned Sethos solemnly. "And he has poured com-

fort and consolation on my way. And I will now depart, as quickly as may be, gathering round my standard the faithful few who will peril their all for their Gods and their country. The Gods pour not their blessings on sloth; but they love the brave heart that toils till its very sinews crack, as if it would force their assistance by merit. And the Great Phtha—the Life-giver—the all-powerful—shall not look on a degenerate son, nor on an unworthy High Priest, when He views me in the battle or before the shrine. If labour, and diligence, and courage may win Heaven's blessing, then, Nitocris, shall thy father obtain them."

"Father! take me with thee to the field. Let me stand by thy side, soothing and comforting as a daughter should. Oh! do not leave me here in Memphis. Its gates will be prison-doors—shutting me out from freedom, barring me into captivity. Its heavy air will stifle me. Thou hast been denied the blessing of a son to bear thy fan, and spread aloft thy banner. Let me stand in his place. And if I may not mingle, man-like, with the fighters before thy breast, let me, within the curtains of the tent, be what he should have been in the

Place of Danger—thy supporter and companion.”

“ Well worthy art thou to be the sole offspring of the King of Egypt...the only child of the Sacred Hierophant,” answered Sethos fervently. “ Long have I ceased to wish for a son, though when thou wert born thy weaker sex grieved me much. But now, when thou standest out before the light as the very Ideal of Woman, I feel that I would not change my maiden child, for the proudest warrior that ever drew bow in Egypt to walk by my side, my son. But thou mayst not come with me, dear love! I could not take thee to a field of carnage and of ruin; where crimson rivers would stain thy sandals with a fearful red, and where shrieks and groans, and, it may be, triumphant cries of ‘ Victory over Sethos!’ would be the music for thine ears; where thy banquet would be bought with life, and thy guests would be the slain. No! no! secure in thy palace thou must remain! And if I fall, thou, too, canst deliver thyself from ignominy and disgrace? I know thee; I can trust thee? Thou wilt die a thousand deaths ere thou sufferest the Assyrian to lay his hand

on thine? Thou wilt promise this, Nitocris, child beloved?"

Nitocris was pale.

"Thou mayst trust me, father!" she replied in a clear, unshaken voice. "Give me this, and thy daughter is as safe from Sennacherib's soldiers as if an iron army closed her round. Nitocris knows well how to die for honor!" She drew from his girdle a small, sharp, hawk-headed dagger, and calmly drawing the chased blade from the jewelled and richly ornamented sheath, tried its edge and temper. "It is keen," she said smiling, as she placed it in the folds of her dress, and pressed her hand upon it, as though she had laid next her heart the dearest treasure of her life.

Sethos turned away his head. The bravest father could not have seen his young and beautiful child so calmly devote herself to a death that seemed inevitable, and not have *felt*. He could not, himself, have placed in her tender hands the weapon that was to slay her, without the very strings of his heart being wrung, though his eyelids might be dry the while. And Sethos, stern ruler and fanatic priest as he was, could no more than meaner men forget

the claims of a father's love, and, it may be, weakness. Nitocris was the only thing in his way of life that spoke of the Gentleness of Beauty. She was the only link between him and loveliness. His life, his thoughts, profession, habits, were all stern, and gloomy, and unlovely. But when his eyes fell upon his darling child a new existence seemed to spring up within him. It was like a glimpse of sunlight in the dark mine, a fairy fountain in a sandy waste. And he felt that he was not wholly shut out from the World of Beauty, when such a creature—its favorite, and most lavishly gifted—clung round him, and called him father.

For a moment he stood motionless. His head was slightly depressed, and one hand spread over his forehead, shaded his eyes.

“And now I must away!” he cried starting.

“And is this thy last farewell, dearest father?” asked Nitocris, anxiously.

“The last? Nay, sweet child! I have commanded Osorchon, the young soldier, to be invested with that post of fan-bearer, which Psammetichus so uncourteously resigned. To-day the ceremony will be performed before he

sets out for Thebes. Thou wilt aid, as Pallacide? Thus shall I see thee once again; and yet once more. In an hour's time all will be ready. Then the brave boy will gather together at Thebes, and by the wayside, all who will follow—the herdsman, where the soldier hangs back—to join me before Pelusium. And all will be noble, for they will bear a noble cause."

"Herdsman, father? Do I hear aright? What! take a handful of undisciplined slaves to war against the Assyrian? Ah! what can such do against so fearful a host?"

"Conquer, my child! Conquer or die."

Nitocris bent her head. "And will not one noble—not one soldier—join thee?" she asked tremulously.

"Not one! I had indeed hoped that Psammetichus would have forgotten his rancour for the weal of his country. But, like all his godless order, he prefers passion to duty, and revenge to a manly submission to the laws!"

"Ah!" sighed Nitocris. "Has he then wholly deserted thee since he gave up the office of fanbearer? Is his heart so utterly changed, and its affections so entirely dead?"

"All have deserted me," replied Setnos,

quietly. "But I need not their help. The aid of the Gods is surely beyond that of human hands."

"Psammetichus," murmured Nitocris. "How could *he* do this?"

"Think no more of it, my child," exclaimed her father, with some quickness. "One arm cannot smite me to the dust, nor one uphold me. All will be well. Even without the assistance of Psammetichus and his brethren, we will shew the proud King of Assyria, that injustice, though defended by the mighty, may work nothing against the right, upheld though it be, by the weak and poor. Nitocris! we are not placed here as slaves to the passions of our fellow-men—as worms to be trodden under foot of the haughty! Surely no! The gods watch over us, and they will not suffer wrong to be done to their servants. Let this belief cheer thee! And now fare thee well! May the good mother guard thee, and bless thee! Forget not the daily prayer—omit not the daily offering. Propitiate the kind gods by thy virtues, so that they may look beneficently on thy father, for his child's sake. O! mighty with the Lords of heaven is the virtue of the loving child! Fare thee

well ; but not for the last time. And yet I feel as sharp a pang as if this kiss were the latest that my lips had to shed upon thy brow !” The king drew his daughter gently towards him, and kissed her forehead ; then slowly turned from the apartment.

Nitocris stood where her father had left her, and tears gathered rapidly and fell on her heaving bosom.

“ This is worse than weakness !” she exclaimed, suddenly dashing them off, and shaking back her crowding tresses with an air of resolution. “ O my heart, thou art hard, very hard to subdue, but thou *shalt* be subdued !”

Alas ! for the weakness of the most determined woman ! Alas ! for the frailness of her strongest power ! It was but a momentary vigour ; for drooping as a young flower sickening in the blast, she sunk her face upon her hands, and leant against the marble column, as one whose whole energy had died.

A man’s hasty step approached ; but she did not hear it ; and she was only aroused from her melancholy attitude, by a deep sigh. Starting, she looked up, and her gaze encountered a young soldier standing close to her side, his looks bent on the ground.

“Why this intrusion, Osorchon?” she asked proudly, all the blood rushing back over her face and bosom.

“I sought the King, Lady ; and Taia, the hand-maid of the Princess, informed me that he was here,” answered Osorchon. “I have news for him to be delivered on the earliest instant. Let this plead my pardon.”

“My father was with me, but he has left me for some moments,” returned Nitocris. “I trust that thy news is not irremediably bad, Osorchon? Yet thy looks are full of alarm, and thou art as pale as a young girl in a circle of bold bowmen.”

“If they speak distress, Lady,” cried the youth, hastily, “if they speak alarm—it is not for myself, but for the beautiful and helpless. The heart of Osorchon never yet quailed with craven fear.”

“Nay,” answered Nitocris. “Art thou not somewhat hasty with thy king’s daughter? I well know that the trusted friend and honored officer of Sethos must necessarily be above the breath of such suspicion! And none honors thy gallant bearing more than myself.”

“Such words from thee, O Nitocris, are dear. And gladly would I lay down my life

for such a death-song of praise to be sung over my bleeding corpse by thee. Nay, be not displeased, nor turn away in anger at my boldness. Though I am but a base-born, and raised by thy father's royal bounty alone to my high place, I, in common with all the youth of Egypt, would do glad service to the death for the praise of the Princess Nitocris. The sun shines above us, Lady—a world infinitely grander than our own—but its genii do not frown because we pay them humblest homage—because we gladden our souls in the beams of their glory, though they shed them not intentionally on *us*. And such homage is paid to thee—the most humble, the most grateful; asking nothing but the privilege of thus worshipping.”

“I understand thee, Osorchon,” returned Nitocris, “but I am no sun to shine thus for worship. I ask no higher homage than that is due to every Egyptian maiden by her birthright—if she be worthy of the name of Khemi's daughter. To me, this is the highest that can be paid. But turn from me to my royal father. He is the most worthy of respect and praise.”

“Sethos is a wise king, and a holy priest ;

and these assimilate him to the gods. And yet, half the honor which is paid to Sethos, is due to the father of Nitocris." And the young man's cheek burned, and his eyes kindled, as he pronounced these last daring words.

"Thy speech is but a poor proof of thy honor for her whom thou dost flatter, young boy. These are bolder phrases than oft meet mine ears—bold and unwelcome. And if thou dost think to win my regard, by failing in reverence, whilst increasing in familiar praises, thou hast utterly mistaken the path."

"Nay, think not that I meant to offend thee by too great boldness!" exclaimed Osorchon. "Thou knowest that I would tear my tongue from between my lips, rather than anger thee by a word."

"Cease this foolish prate of thy devotion," said Nitocris with some of her father's sternness. "It wearies, while it offends me. And art thou not delaying over long, Osorchon? The King loves not neglectful waste of precious moments in unseemly trifling. Thou wilt find thy best account with him in instant attendance on thy duties. Farewell; and the next time that we meet, forget not the place

which thou holdest, nor that in which the gods have set me."

"Thy pardon, Lady," said Osorchon proudly; and he turned away.

"Poor boy," sighed Taia as she came forward from behind the pillars, where she had been lurking, and, it may be, watching, and, it may be, listening even! "So!—this scheme hath failed. Well! Nitocris thinks that she doth right, when she is thus cold and severe. But sure nor Nature nor Isis, our kind mother, ever willed the death of feeling."

A look of pain was on the face of Nitocris, when she turned towards her maid as she came nearer. But it swiftly vanished, and left in its stead only the proud air she always wore; perhaps a little heightened, as if it were not wholly natural, but was a mask, convenient for the moment.

"Listen, girl," she said with severity, the better to conceal what she could not repress. "Thou shalt find me—even me, thy childhood's friend,—a hard and harsh task-mistress, if thou darest thus to play thine apish pranks upon me. Dost thou think that Nitocris holds herself no higher than to be made the aim of

every beardless boy's ambition? Dost thou think that she can see with satisfaction, or hear with patience, the bold looks, and bold words, which each ignoble of her father's train chuses to pour forth? Thou hast mistaken her widely, maiden, if thou dreamest that such childish mummery raise in her any other feelings than those of contempt and disgust!"

"Not even pity, lady?" asked the girl. Dost thou not pity the wounded spirit? Canst thou not mourn for the bitter tears wrung from the very heart?—for the blighting of life's spring-tide,—the withering of life's blossoms? This poor Osorchon!—his life is one long sigh breathed out in the dull, sad night. No joy, no light; darkness and sorrow his only portion! And thou dost not pity, though his heart—strings crack?"

"Hush! hush! Taia," cried Nitocris wildly. "It matters nought to him nor to thee whether I pity or despise! Thy business is with thine own actions—not with my thoughts. Pity for blighted love?—what is that to thee?—what is that to thee? Thou art bold and unmannerly, Taia! Take heed! else thou wilt lose my heart for ever. Blighted love?—who

speaks thus? It is a falsehood! There is not such a feeling!"

Taia glanced at the restless eyes and flushed countenance of her mistress, whose calm air was lost in one of wildness and distress. Then a bright sunny smile came leaping out from every feature of the handmaid's dimpling face: so eloquent and unchecked was it, that you might have thought you heard a merry laugh ringing through the rosy bars of her lips. She hid her face, and whispered to herself:

"It is as I thought; there is more here than the sun beholds! Yes, love, dear love, is even in that proud heart, and is avenging his long neglect with a fearful revenge."

Love, fair Taia? Did he dwell in *thy* heart in such an atmosphere of joy, that his presence in another's was hailed with glee? Far different is he to most! For born and baptised in tears, his growth and life are oft of the same, and his shroud, spun of dark threads of sorrow, doth not even enwrap a perfect rest. Smiles for a maiden's love? Nay; rather pity and truest sympathy;—for her hour of trial hath come, and the star of her doom hath gloomed above the mountains. If she love

not, her fate is chill, and her days sunless ; but, if she love, a worse fate than chillness will befall her, and the pallidness of a sunless sky will be glory to the red lightning of the storm which will rage around her. My Taia, thy soul yet in the green fields of girlhood, laughing amongst its flowers, and mocking the very lark in its joy—ignorant of the fearful meaning lying in that one word LOVE, and of the poison which it breathes—sees in it but a long, fairy-haunted hour of delight. Wake not maiden—oh, never—never wake to the knowledge of this love ! For in the day when thou dost unveil that seraph-like form, which, wrapped in a misty robe of glorious beauty, hovers on thy path, and with gentle gestures lures thee to his side, thou shalt unveil a phantom that will make thee—yea, even in the warmth of thy young spring-tide—yearn for the rest of the cold, dank grave, whose worm and corruption will be dearer than thy gifts from him ! Woe and lamentation for the maiden that loves !”

CHAPTER V.

THE VISION. PSAMMETICHUS, THE NOBLE OF
SAIS. THE WISDOM OF PRINCIPLE, AND THE
WISDOM OF PRACTICE.

BEFORE Sethos had entered the apartment of Nitocris, after leaving the refractory assembly, he had hastened to the Temple of Phtha, of which he was the high priest, to implore the succour of his God against the oppressions of his fellow men. His day indeed looked dark, and the sun of his life seemed set for ever. Sennacherib the King of Assyria, was entrenched, with his countless hosts, before the gates of Pelusium. This was a city both well-manned

and strongly fortified, but it could not hold out long against such a force as that now beleaguering it. Brave and devoted as were the besieged, they could not conquer, like the giants and Cyclops of old—the few against the many—the one Titan slaughtering armies of pigmy men. And Diycos, the governor, had sent to inform the king that unless instant and efficient aid were sent, Pelusium must be taken, though the conqueror's scaling-ladder might be the dead bodies of its defenders.

Sethos was the first king of Egypt who had been immediately chosen from the ecclesiastical order, for many generations. For though the monarch, by virtue of his office, must be likewise in part a priest, and if not admitted into the knowledge of all the mysteries, at least, made conversant with a great portion of them, yet he was more as the life-long pupil than the equal of the Hierophants—more obeying than assisting—subject to the priesthood, not commanding it. Sethos had been appointed the successor of Anysis, the Blind, both by the will of the dying king, and also by the influence of the Priests, who had long coveted the regal sceptre as the rightful property of

the Temple: some from ambition, and some from the pious, though mistaken belief, that as the gods were the supreme rulers of the world, so also the priests, their servants, and their human representatives, should be the supreme guides and governors of society.

Of the last class had been Sethos himself; of the first, Amasis, the Hierophant of the Theban Temple of Amunrà. Haughty, irreligious, learned beyond all of his time in the many secret arts and sciences, whose shadows only have reached our remote age—despising his kind, and the means of ruling them, yet loving rule above all things—he, too, had stretched out his hand to obtain the Double Crown. But his brethren, many of whom feared, and even hated the dark, unbending Pontiff, withheld their suffrages from him to lavish them on Sethos the Memphite. From that moment, a deadly thirst for revenge had taken possession of the soul of Amasis. The wide world was too narrow for him and Sethos; and either the blood of the king, or that of his own heart, must water the Valley of the Nile.

But wisely had the priests chosen between these two aspirants. Had Amasis been the

monarch, the Temple would have gained a fierce master who would have crushed its gigantic power with a force superior to its own. Careless of future consequences, he would have sacrificed all to his passion of absolute dominion. He would never have consented to live as the docile instrument of the sacred Synod ; nor yet have studied the interests of the Temple, in making them his own. Rather would he have subjugated the priesthood with the same unsparing severity as that which he would have exercised towards the people at large. Sethos, on the contrary, was in all things a fit governor ; inasmuch, as he was the obedient servant, and unwearying promoter of the views of the Holy Order.

On his accession to the throne, actuated by the same pure though unwise principle of priestly domination alone, he had deprived the nobles and soldiery of their lands and privileges, and had bestowed them upon the Temple ; designing, from henceforth, to govern solely by moral discipline, and spiritual subjection. In consequence of these laws, the injured classes had freed themselves from all allegiance to their oppressor ; and tear-

ing their standards into a thousand fragments, they disbanded their companies, and repaired to what of house and home was left them; all in a state of deep discontent. Psammetichus, the bravest and noblest-hearted of his order or his day, was the only captain who had not yet dispersed his troops. Yet he refused their assistance to the king, and kept in the uncertain position of neutrality; taking part neither with the rebel nobles, not yet with the monarch, and maintaining a strict silence as to his future intentions.

This discontent of the soldiery and their chiefs, Amasis by messages—secret meetings—artful and anonymous threats—promises, and insinuations—oracles and portents—and all the various juggleries of an occult religion, had fomented to the utmost. And the result was, as has been seen, their refusal to march to Pelusium. In vain Sethos assembled them in the council hall of the royal palace. In vain he adjured them by all that they held most dear—their wives—their children—their fathers' sacred tombs—the holy altars of their gods—in vain he appealed to each holiest feeling of man's heart, mingling the Pontiff's curse with the king's exhortation; the nobles list-

ened and moved not. In vain he menaced with fearful emphasis ; a contemptuous smile was their only reply.

“Thy means, O King?” they asked sneeringly. And Sethos felt that hope was at an end.

Quitting the assembly, he hurried to the temple of Phtha, to ask advice and consolation from heaven, since he could find none on earth. A dreary, unknown path lay before him, and his first step might plunge him and his whole kingdom into ruin. But he grieved more at the prospect of the desecration of the Temple, than at the misery of his people. And he deemed it a worse misfortune that the Sacred Emblems should be touched by profane hands, than that living hearts should bleed. Yet Sethos was neither cruel nor merciless ; he was but the priest, where others were men.

“Unless thou assist me, Phtha, O thou great and powerful!” he exclaimed, falling prostrate on the ground before the image in the Adytum, “unless thou dost send me help from thy High Place, and dost fight for me and my people, we must fall captives to the bow and the spear of the infidel Assyrian. Our homes will be laid waste, and the sacred altars

cast down; the wolf and the panther will roam through our cities, and the vulture and the raven will house in our chambers. Oh! do thou defend us, Phtha, thou mighty! The land which thou hast blessed, give it not over to desolation! Thy faithful people,—deliver them not into the hands of the Gentile and Barbarian! Defend us!—for no aid but thine can avail us! Oh! give not up thine altar into the power of Sennacherib! Let not his soldiers' unblessed feet tread through the sacred groves; nor their impious eyes behold the mysteries of the adyta, nor look on the glories of the emblems. Phtha—Creator—Spirit of Life!—suffer not the Pure Land to be smitten with the double death! Guard thy shrine: protect thy Temple; and bury in one ruin the invader and the conquered, rather than suffer pollution to be done to the holy places! Sweep the whole race of man from the face of the earth, rather than suffer a stone of the *Ædes* to be desecrated! Phtha, assist thy servant with thy glorious aid, and point out the way for his failing steps!”

Sethos remained long in earnest prayer; until, wearied and overcome by his emotions, he sunk into a deep sleep.

While he thus lay before the shrine, suddenly a thick blackness—cold and clammy—a blackness that could be felt—fell down like a heavy pall from the dead sky, and covered the earth with its fearful cerecloth. And a maddening Dread seized the king in its corpse-like arms, and pressed like a foul night-hag upon his bosom, stifling peace and life together. And strange, unclean things crawled in and amongst the folds of his garment, and crept over his shuddering flesh, tracking their slimy way in matted groups and writhing rings. He felt them pass over his damp brow. They kiss his trembling lips. They peer into the depths of his fainting eye, and necklace his throat with their living beads. Oh horrible! most horrible! The worst tortures of the foulest fiend of Typho—the sternest sentence of the dread Assessors—were dearer than this! And all was noiseless, like the path of a poison blight: a spelled silence which might not be broken. And the world and the air heaved up and down like the ocean, before it bursts out into the foam of the angry tempest. And the Stillness staid; and Sethos felt that Madness was linked with it.

Ha! what is that? The silence is gone, and now all the winds of heaven rush like howling

maniacs loosed from their chains, and rage in the sky as furious demons at war; and the universe shakes to its very centre at the breath of the wild blast. Then the roof the Temple cracked asunder, and fell in large masses on the marble floor, breaking in their course the noble pillars with their proud capitals and stately shafts—overthrowing the statues—defacing the pictures that glowed on the wall as though life itself were smiling there---ruining as they rushed---overwhelming all in their wreck, like the sand-storm of the desert. Terror filled the very soul of the king, for he was chained with cords which he could not break--bound down to the earth, helpless as a young child amid all this ruin. Large drops fell like rain from his convulsed body, and his strong limbs quivered, as they vainly endeavoured to get free. But a maid in the hand of a Titan was powerful, contrasted with his might in the grasp of this Dread.

And on went the din and tumult of crashing rafters and falling stones, pouring in wild confusion over the holy Adytum; threatening even the sacred shrine and symbol with destruction. And the wind howled and screamed through the echoing walls, and caught up in

its rough whirling arms the beams and blocks as they broke from their holds, and tossed them like wild playthings in its fierce lap. And still the darkness was spread over all. But now it was hot and stifling; and forked lightnings flashed at intervals from its inky edge in quivering streams of blinding glare. And the silence had given place to the angry voice of the meteor-haired tempest, with that plaintive wail, which seems to sound from out the deep as the wail of the lost and ruined. The death hour of creation seemed at hand: and the powers of nature were uttering their loud cries of anguish at the might of the pain. It was a fearful hour! The tearing asunder of the strong cord of life, which binds the universe in its harmonious completeness—the forcing apart from their strait embraces the parent elements and their children of matter—was a sight of horror as overwhelming as its cause was gigantic. In the death hour of creation—the last struggles of slaughtered nature—he, the puny man, lay there, to watch each expiring throe of that which had been an immortal God! And now all was stillness—the stillness of death; and the universe seemed melting away, leaving that Egyptian king

the sole tenant of a limitless space—the sole thing that drew the breath of being.

Then the whole changed, The black void passed away, and the serene deep blue of the sky shone out in all its noonday glory. It came like a living creature that looked on the kneeling king, smiling as it gazed. The very clouds that flecked its azure, and caught upon their curling edge the long beams of the yellow sunshine, hung like perfumed ringlets round a maiden's laughing brow, adding a loveliness of their own for the beauty which they hid. The heavens opened as a veil that is withdrawn from some sweet, curtained form; and through the rent flowed down a wide stream of glory that filled the air with radiance, and shed over all an unspeakable beauty. A beauty which had a music, whose tones seemed the articulate gift of life. And the glory streamed down in still increasing intensity of brightness; and the music swelled, filling the air with sounds heard by the soul rather than by the sense. And then a form, luminous and radiant, floated down to the altar before which Sethos lay. And the looks of the Form were bright as the sun, and, like that, gave out a living warmth. Upon his brow glittered a

sacred scarab, which had an inherent lustre, as if it had been formed of elemental fire; and his bright eyes moved restlessly, sparkling with brilliant hues, and rivalling its rainbow-coloured wings and body in their brightness and swift changes. The hands of the Heavenly Form held the signs of majesty and dominion, with the mystic cross, the emblem of life. These he extended to the king with a smile, that flashed like a meteor passing through the air.

“Sethos!” said the Divine Visitant, “fear not! On to Pelusium—bravely forward! Gather together the meanest and the most despised of thy people,—the herdsman,—the shepherd,—the artisan—and go against Sennacherib with confidence. I, Phtha, the God whom thou dost worship above all the other Gods of the Pure Land—I will defend and protect thee. My High Priest shall not faint for lack of defenders. My might shall be on thy side, and thou needst not mourn that thy brother-man hath forsaken thee, when thy god will protect. Thou shalt prevail and thou shalt conquer, if thou wilt not fear. On to Pelusium! Smite, and be victorious.”

The light and the glory faded away; and

the blue vault closed its impenetrable walls, and shut out from the king the unearthly radiance which he had beheld through the parted azure. Then the broken roof of the temple again arched over head, and this true heaven with its own mimic one of painted stars and cloudless blue. And all things were unharmed and beautiful as before.

With a start Sethos awoke, springing to his feet with the expectation of beholding yet the traces of the parting God; but his eyes rested only on the pigmy statue of lifeless stone—the deformed, debased representation of the great Demiurgos. And a scarabæus, which, bright and glistening though it were, looked dull and dead to the senses filled with the remembrance of the celestial splendour of the Divine Symbol, crawled lazily upon its cushion, as if it mocked the creed that named its weary sluggishness, the Impersonation of Life. Yet the voice still rung in the ears of the king, and the warmth and light still lived in his heart; and he rose from the ground joyous and gladdened. Claspings his hands he looked upon the statue with fervent devotion, as if it, too, had the reality of that of which it was but the sign—life; and

as if that cold marble could hear and reply to his enthusiasm.

“ Thank thee, O Greatest of the Gods ! ” he cried, “ thanks and glory be thine own ! I have seen the face of Phtha ! I have looked upon his shining brow, and have laid up his words in the treasure-house of my heart. He has promised me aid. And Phtha-Sokari will not fail his High Priest ! ”

And yet it was but a vision. But he believed in its truth, until he looked on Nitocris ; and then all the father woke ; and the man trembled, and the devotee failed in his trust. For visions are but unsatisfying earnest of the safety of a darling child. This was again a conflict between Faith and Fear. The dreams of enthusiasm may be powerful, but they cannot instil confidence into the heart of love. Love, satisfied with no visionary assurance—trembling if a shade but cross the pathway of the beloved—ever fearing even when that beloved is best guarded, lest some unknown danger creep in unawares—Love that bleeds for every tear that falls—finds in dreams and omens but scant frail shields against the power of actual danger.

And Sethos felt this distrust as he left the

apartment of his daughter, and vainly endeavoured to recal some of that rapturous confidence which had lately blazed forth in his heart.

On quitting the Princess, Osorchon abandoned himself to despair. During the first part of the short interview which had been furnished him by the compassionate Taia, the unwonted softness of Nitocris—arising from the subduing influence of sorrow—had thrown him for a moment off his guard. For though ever maintaining in demeanour, the respect and reserve prescribed him by Egyptian rules of decorum, he had long cherished a wild and presumptuous hope, that perhaps she was not wholly indifferent to him—even to him ! True, he was of foreign birth, which to the Egyptian's pride was a synonyme with degradation ; and though about to be promoted to the high office of fan-bearer—a post, until now, only assigned to the princes of the blood-royal, or to the highest of the nobles—yet this promotion was so entirely the gift of the personal favor of the king, and so evidently not the reward of his own merit, that he could not glory, even in his dignity.

He failed in many things which were considered indispensable for the formation of a worthy man ; he was hasty, passionate, enthu-

siastic, wanting in self-control, and, above all, wanting in calm reflection. He was made up of all the reckless and headstrong ardors of youth, and had feelings of far riper growth than judgment ; still he had also so much of youth's generous impulses, unselfishness, and devotion, that his faults, grave as they were in Egyptian eyes, were to be forgiven for the beauty of their companion virtues.

Rapid were his thoughts, as he caught the gentle smile of Nitocris ; glorious were his visions ; heaven-like his emotions ; and in a few moments he would have boldly poured forth a flood of eloquent adoration, had not the blight of her cold reproof fallen on him to wither up his new-born flowers of hope.

At first all had grown dark before the eyes of the young lover ; a cold shivering seized his limbs ; a faintness came over him ; and he felt a dull aching as from a heavy blow, and a dreary sense of loneliness. He had left the apartment mechanically, not rightly knowing whither his steps tended. But this first effect of violent disappointment soon passed away, and he woke as a sleep-walker suddenly aroused. Then the full sense of what had passed rushed over his mind. His bright, brief dream,—his wild hopes—presumptuous

aspirations, and fatal repulse—all mingled together in one moment of misery. What was he to do, now that the hope lay dashed into a thousand shapeless fragments, which, in its perfectness and beauty, had been his great incentive to virtue? What portion in the future had life for him? Pain, unmitigated, helpless, hopeless! Why not rather die? Death is no tyrant—no grim enemy whose presence is worse than the worst evils of life; but rather is he a gentle youth with beaming smiles and golden hair—a youth whose cup is filled with the sweet water that flows under the throne of the Lotus-borne—one who comes softly like a welcomed deliverer, and brings joy in his train. To the happy, alone, is Besa, the death-god, terrible; to the sorrowful he shines in fairer form than even the beautiful young Horus—the darling of creation. To lie on the mossy couch where all dear, wild flowers wave, when the limbs are stiff with toil, and the heart is faint with pain; to lie there with the soft west wind playing among the hair, and bathing the tired frame in its golden fount of renovation; to listen to the birds overhead, as they trill out their loves to the blossoms; to watch the dreamy flight of the bright moths, or the meteor-course of

the rainbow flies, with the languid senses steeped in heaven-like repose ; such is it to lie on the bed of death, when the world has bruised the spirit and seared the heart. And the God of Death is then in truth, brighter and more beloved than the highest angel from above !

Such were the thoughts that now came crowding over the mind of Osorchon. And he thought that thus would he feel for ever. For youth will not believe that Time will ever heal the bleeding wound, and obliterate all trace of its presence. That which it feels now it must feel hereafter. The joy will never fade, the pain will never cease. Poor children—and yet blessed ! They little dream how soon the world will efface the bright painting of bliss, or wash away the mark of sorrow : how soon it will harden their tender souls into more than adamantine impenetrability, and chill their warmth into more than ice-bound coldness !

Something roused the young soldier from his trance. The voice of the king. For Osorchon was standing near the door of the private chamber of the monarch, utterly unconscious of his place.

“My son ! what ails thee ?” cried Sethos, wonderingly, as he looked at the pale cheek of

his young attendant. "Has an evil spirit come over thee, Osorchon?"

"Evil!" repeated the young man; "Ah! evil in truth!"

Sethos took his arm, and led him gently into his own chamber. "Evil for the Temple, or my people, boy?" he asked.

"The people?...the Egyptian people? Nay, not evil for the people—not for them!" replied Osorchon, dreamily.

"Ye gods! preserve the sacred signs!" exclaimed the king, solemnly. "No sickness hath befallen the Holy Bull? No evil omen hath been given by the victim? The sacred Scarab of the Temple, hath not forgotten the course of the sun? The Isiac serpents have not dragged their length in anger round the mother's altar? Nay, none of these fearful misfortunes could have happened, and thou be made acquainted with them sooner than myself! Thou hast heard nought of these dread tidings in the merchant city?"

"The Temple is still safe—the omens are not evil!" said the soldier in the same dreamy voice and manner.

"Surely thou art possessed!" cried Sethos, "Rouse thyself, and say what has happened to

thee. Lift up thy head erect like a man, and stand not thus, cowering like a very slave!"

Osorchon was roused by the stern tone in which the king spoke. The bright blood rushed over his cheek, and his eyes flashed with renewed energy, though their looks were full of shame.

"It was but a dream, my father," he said quickly, while he bent before the king, raising one hand to his lips, and lowering the other to his knee. "Let it pass. It came alone, and neither brought nor left behind it, aught of evil. The shadow of Typho passed over my soul. It hath gone. And yet I have news for thee," he added, hurriedly, to prevent the king's further questionings. "And unwelcome news, too. Not only have thy nobles refused to join thy standard, but some have even openly declared their intention of joining the Assyrian. They are already preparing for the march!"

"Ha! And can the hearts of the sons of Khemi be so black? and can their consciences be so seared? If they have forgotten what is patriotism—have they also forgotten religion? O dread deities, smite this impious race utterly to the dust! yet slay not the

innocent with the guilty. But art thou sure, Osorchon? Dost thou know for a truth that thy words are correct? Who has told thee these fearful tidings? Speak boy. Speak quickly. Thou hast made my heart beat stronger than is its wont. That the men of Egypt should do a thing so vile—so worthless—so black in crime! Woe to the Lord of the Nation! Sorrow to the brow which is diademed! For thorns, and the poisoned berry which clings into the brain, have not more tortures than hath the golden band of the Double Crown! Rightly have our fathers emblemized the royal power by the green-eyed uræus. It is, in truth, a thing that will sting the bearer, and poison his life's blood! Alas! alas! But it may yet be false; my people may yet be true, if not to their king—at least, to their Gods? Speak, Osorchon. Who told thee that the nobles had thus publicly revolted? Thou mayest have been misinformed. Aye, this is possible."

"Nay, holy father, would that I could confirm thy hope of this! But I myself was the hearer—and my senses conveyed this fearful tale to my soul. I passed a group of

soldiers and nobles, as they stood by the corner of the Street of Arms; and I heard words fall from their loud and angry lips that seemed to dry up my life's blood. I halted near—I mingled in their speech—and then I understood more plainly, what was its import—rebellion and treachery. I dared—I, even I—a youth and an alien—yet strong in the consciousness of right—I dared to reprove and exhort the noble of Mizraim. To no avail! They jeered me for my birth—mocked me for my beardless youth—bade me go crouch at thy feet, and sell mine honor for thy gold—and one raised his hand as if to strike me. I bore it all—though, by the Eternal Snake, my blood was hot, and I had pain to keep myself from smiting him to the death! Yet, if I meet with that proud noble in the plains of Pelusium, the red sun shall not sink until he has told which blood be bravest! But I forebore to-day, for the sake of my priest and lord: for I know that unseemly violence can destroy the most righteous cause. So I stayed my hand, and was still: grief though it was to my Arab heart! Aye! I was still, though I felt that a stain had fallen upon my honor!"

"Brave boy," said Sethos, kindly. "In this

forbearance thou hast best proved thy manliness! Passion is for the weak—calmness, forbearance, self-control, are the truest marks of strength!”

“And this praise from the lips of the sacred monarch, would have repaid me a hundred fold! O Sethos!” the young man continued, with all his unchecked enthusiasm. “Thou little knowest of how much power thy least word is possessed! I would dare the worst ill of life, if thy approving smile cheered me on! Thou art twice mighty! For encircled with the double Bow of glory—as king and as priest—thy regal praise is also thy holy blessing!” He did not say that, as the father of Nitocris, he thus worshipped the king, nor, that had it not been for this halo which love cast over him, he had been to the ambitious soldier but as the means by which his ambition was to be gratified. “And now, O king, what wilt thou do?” he added, after a short pause. “Thou hast to contend, not only with disaffection, but also with rebellion: not only with lack of aid, but also with increased opposition! Thy means are scant—those of thine enemies many. Thy friends are few and weak—thy foes are like the sand on the ocean-shore, and powerful as

the breath of the simoom. Alas for Egypt ! Her sons have despised her, and have lifted up their hands against her ! They have robbed her of their aid, to give it to the Gentile ! Alas ! for Egypt !—the pure land of Khem !”

“ Let these false hearts go in peace,” answered the king, calmly, “ Let them rage as they will. The gods and the right are with us—foul wrong only is on their side !”

“ The blessing of traitors be theirs !” cried Osorchon. “ And may the smile of the pestilence be their sole reward ! Yet ah ! though they bear the wrong cause, they also bear the strong. And poor, frail, fainting good can work but little against the mightier evil.”

“ Osorchon take heed, lest in doubting; thou dost blaspheme,” said Sethos, sternly. “ Dost thou dare to doubt either the power or the goodness of the guardian gods ?”

“ Yet they may smite the Land, holy father, in anger at the iniquity of its children,” said Osorchon, humbly.

“ They will defend,” replied the king, sinking his voice a whisper, “ Let not thy heart faint, for the God at whose shrine I sacrifice has promised to protect His Altar—the wide

Temple of Egypt! Let this inspire thee with confidence and courage. Ha! who comes?"

The door of the apartment suddenly opened, and a powerful, majestic man, in the dress of a captain of the chariot, strode forward; neither announced by the usual attendants, nor himself accompanied by guard or servant.

The king rose from his seat with an exclamation of surprise, in which might be detected a slight shade of fear; and advanced a few steps towards the intruder. He mechanically raised his hand to his girdle, where the royal dagger always hung, then knit his brows as he remembered that he had disarmed himself in the apartment of Nitocris. Osorchon, too, was without weapon of any kind; and the stranger, on the contrary, glittered with bronze and steel.

"I come unannounced and boldly, O king!" began the intruder, making a respectful obeisance. "I come also, I fear me, unwelcomed. It was not thus when I was thy peculiar friend and honored fan-bearer. Then, entrance to thy presence was a right, and my reception a father's greeting. Pardon me, if thus once again I use my old privilege, and forget the changes

which time and events have wrought between us. Minor matters of courtly usage must yield to the importance of weighty business."

"Thy will, Psammetichus of Sais?" asked the king, proudly. "For I confess, that I am unable to solve the mystery of thy thus visiting me. Unless, indeed, it be to offer me thine own services, and those of thy troop: prefacing with a prayer for my acceptance of thy repentance!"

Psammetichus retreated a few steps, and drawing himself up to his full height, fixed his clear eyes full upon Sethos with a look of surprise and scorn. He answered almost bitterly :

"Thou art exacting in thy requirements, O king !"

"And thou art arrogant in thy speech, and insolent in thy mien, Psammetichus !"

"Insolent and arrogant ! these words, to me, from Sethos, the Pontiff of Phtha ?"

"Aye ! and more—and stronger. Thou art a rebel and a traitor ; and if not yet declared, it is because thou art a coward, and wouldst rather slay in ambush than conquer in the open field of common danger !"

The blood left the face of the Noble, and

for a moment, his hand was on the jewelled hilt of his dagger. It was but for a moment ; then removing himself still farther from Sethos, he answered coldly, and with dignity,

“ I come not to bandy words, O King, but to arrange deeds. Withdraw thy unjust decree against our order, and I will join thy army with my troops. And more, I will guarantee thee from amongst those very nobles, now so unyielding, as brave a phalanx as ever drew bow. Thy answer Lord ! ”

“ I will die ere I change a letter of my decree,” said the king firmly. “ Hard pressed as I am, I am not yet in that strait when my subjects may dare dictate unto me—may dare insult me with impunity.”

“ I dictate in nought, O Sethos ! I but offer thee my brave spearmen for the simple wages of justice. Callest thou this insult ? ”

“ For the wages of justice ! The fools cry ! Say rather for the wages of perjury, Psammethichus ! The lands which I have devoted to the Temple it would be sacrilege to re-appropriate to another use, and that use, a secular one. The privileges which I have given to the servants of the Gods are a sacrifice to the Dread Deities of the gifts of thy blood-stained

and unholy order ; it would be impious to withdraw them. And let what will arrive, my heart shall never beat before the Shrine with the fear of punishment. My subjects may revile and desert ; I can meet it calmly, while I still feel that I have stood firm and faithful to the interests of the *Ædes*, and have not violated the sanctity which encompasses the meanest stone within the *temenos*. Justice, *thou* namest it, desecration and indignity *I*."

"And for this priestly prejudice thou wilt deliver up thy land and thy people into the power of the Assyrian !" exclaimed Psammetichus energetically, forgetting in his impatience that respect which was due to the Egyptian Pontiff, as well as to the Monarch of the Two Worlds.

"I will defend my people, Psammetichus, and slay the Assyrian," answered Sethos sternly.

"How ? With slings and stones, and net, and fish-hook ? For methinks the users of such weapons will be thy sole warriors." And the noble's lip curled as he added, "The army of Sennacherib may be composed of Gentiles and Barbarians, but they will

hold a higher place than these ! He, himself, the Assyrian King, though he might not be dishonored at the victory of Egyptian nobles, will be nigh disgraced at the opposition of such foes. Be the brave man a barbarian, still is he nobler than the vile herdsman even of the Valley of the Nile ! But it will not be long an undecided question, whether the honor of arms is outraged through the conquest of a royal warrior by slaves, or the Pure Land laid waste beneath the tread of the Gentile. The last will be the lot of this hapless country ! To such a pass has thy adherence to a fault, over which thou hast flung the veil of self-delusion, brought thyself and thy people ! Deserted by the nobles whom thou hast wronged—supported only by the basest of the populace, thou goest out against a host, invincible and honorable, whose contempt for their enemies will but lend them greater strength, and drest of success the while !”

“ By the help of the Gods I will conquer. Yea ; and that will I do, though not a noble and not a trained soldier fight with me ; though mine army be of the meanest alone.”

“ Sethos ! Sethos ! canst thou calmly go

forward with such a foolish vision as thy only earnest of success? Shame on thy years and thy wisdom!" cried Psammetichus passionately.

"The noble Psammetichus forgets the presence in which he stands," said Sethos severely.

"Forgets it? That does he not," the Saite answered in a high voice. "Would that he could forget the follies which have marked thy reign! Would that he could forget their coming consequences—misgovernment and wrong—these are the bright spots which the noble cannot indeed forget! But a truce to these empty words," he added suddenly, remembering himself and speaking calmly and reverentially, "I ask thy forgiveness for all in which I have offended. I have done wrong. I have allowed my patriot's heart to speak louder than my subject's reverence. Again, Sethos, do I offer thee myself, my men, and my peers, if thou wilt but restore us our homes and our rights."

"And again, I say thee, nay; though my heart's blood wet my foot as I spoke. And again I say that thou art a rebel and a traitor—arrogant and impious—else on thy

knees wouldst thou have sunk, asking for pardon and gracious reconciliation, rather than stand boldly there, making thy conditions. And, but that I cannot wholly forget the past time when thou wert dear to me as mine own son, I would even now call my guards, and make thee learn the meaning of Repentance beneath the lash of the executioner. Think not that because I am careless of state, and gladly lay aside the pomps of majesty, I am likewise careless of the respect due to me as the Representative of the Gods. In me, honor them. Dare not to make this stipulation or that, but pray humbly for pardon of the past and favor for the future. Then, perchance, I may listen to thy words. But now thou art unworthy my attention, for thy insolence and folly are degrading to thyself and to me."

The eyes of Psammetichus flashed with anger, and he seemed about to make a hasty reply, but checking himself, the mild and serene expression which was natural to him, came again over his face like a beautiful dream of the night. And his noble loveliness looked more lovely still from this majesty of dominion

over passion—the brightest grace of manhood.

He answered calmly, but sorrowfully—
“ Misfortune will open thine eyes, O King! and then thou wilt regret that my words went forth in vain. Sethos,” he added fervently, “ oh! as thy friend—thy son—thy trusted fan-bearer—do, I pray thee, here, on my bended knee, to re-consider thine answer! Cast not away this last chance of success! Neglect not this last opportunity to repair an error, which, committed at first from motives pure as the sunbeam from the God of Day, if wilfully persisted in, becomes the act of a heart obstinate in its own blind course. Father---priest---king---turn not away from this prayer of one who loved thee in his innermost soul; who honored thee almost as a God! Oh! thyself slay not thy people; for in what consists the difference between him who strikes the blow, and him who first binds the victim then delivers him up into the hand of the murderer? Slay not thy Egyptian people, O Sethos; but defend them.” And Psammetichus clasped the robe of the king, and touching his right hand laid his own on his lip.

“I am the servant of the Gods, not of men,” replied Sethos with uplifted eyes, “and to the Assessors of Amenti am I alone accountable. I doubt not that the Great Beings whom I serve, and whose honor I would preserve inviolate sooner than my own life—doubt not but that they will aid me in my trial. But if they are wrath with me, and chastise me by the hand of the Assyrian—if they suffer me to perish, and make me thus expiate my sins of negligence, and my crimes of omission—yet will I not murmur; neither will I buy myself assistance through desertion of my trust. I will not give ye back your lands or privileges, ye proud nobles, though I should gain each spear that now menaces me! Alone, with no help save that which comes from the Altar, will I die in honor, rather than live in crime!”

“We regard thy duties differently,” said Psammetichus sadly, as he slowly rose from his kneeling position. “To me it seems that thou owest the first unto the country thou dost govern; and thou wilt not say that a patriotic rule is a vice because it wars with thy duty as priest? Kings were made for action, Se-

thos ! While on earth, amongst men, they must study the needs of those over whom they have power, and they must yield to the passions, and even to the prejudices of human nature !”

“Thy meaning ?”

“Simply this ! Were thy people such as the Great Gods love, they would have voluntarily given up their all for the weal of the Temple and the Hierophants. But being frail, weak, and selfish, they murmur at the appropriation of their means—even to so holy a purpose.”

“And these vices the noble Psammetichus defends ? Time hath marvellously changed my ancient fan-bearer.”

“I defend them not, O King ! I but repeat, that the legislator must rule for, and not in opposition to, men’s natures. Change selfishness into devotion, and coldness into enthusiasm ; make the unseen Gods more near and dear than the wife and the child, and then thou mayst deal with men as thou hast dealt—then thou mayst treat them as bright angels without passion, fault, or folly, and forget that the Great Thoth bestowed on them all these with their virtues.”

“I like not the tone of thy speech, Psammetichus. The faithful Priest ought not to think thus or act. This cold wisdom of expediency has always been hateful to my soul. And I had rather act for the honor of the Gods, than for the wisest plan of human government. Good cannot result from evil.”

“Alas! alas! thy lips never spoke a word more fatally true!” said Psammetichus, “and the captive land of Khem, too, will soon learn that sorrowful truth! But now I will depart. My mission is ended,---and woe to Egypt!---it is fruitless.”

“And now thou goest to bear arms against me, doubtless!” cried the King, with a sneering accent in his voice, “and because thou canst not constrain me by words, thou thinkest to do so by deeds. Good luck to thy prowess! In the Street of Arms thou wilt find troops of thy brave brethren declaring rebellion. Why not join them? Why dost thou tarry? Haste to swell the goodly band! Flee to Sennacherib; and by your brave and loyal spears aid him to subdue your Monarch! A fair sight for the sun to behold! He shines not, Psammetichus, on one so false and black through the wide plain of our earth. Nay, not even among the Gen-

tile and Babarian ! And ye are men of Egypt ! children of Amun, and emanations of the glorious Phtha ! And ye consort with the infidel, because your King honors the Gods who sustain you through the heat of the day, and the gloom of night. Oh ! ye are brave men of Egypt ! Ye are valiant spearmen and honorable captains of the chariots ! Thou dost revile my poor cohorts of herdsmen and shepherds, Psammetichus ; yet they bear a higher heart before the Dwellers of Amenti, than beats in all you nobles' rebel bands."

"With my future, O Sethos, thou hast nought to do, now that thou hast rejected its control. I made thee my offer in all good faith. Thou hast spurned it and me alike. And now our paths separate, thine to the east, mine to the west, never to meet again. And the bond of friendship which long years had woven into the firmest chain is snapped asunder like a flaxen thread. And thus sadly ends the first, and, as I beileve, the truest love that woke my soul to feeling. Sadly—sadly it ends."

Sethos was moved; yet too proud to show it, he answered coldly,

"I also grieve that thus ends our friendship; yet if its continuance is to be

bought only by my perjury, assuredly its death hour hath come! I bid thee farewell! And I bid thee, too, blessing, in as far as the Gods can bless one stained with the crimes of rebellion and,—aye, Psammetichus, impiety!”

Psammetichus faintly smiled as he shook his head, in deprecation of the last word; but unwilling to give up every chance of success in an undertaking so dear to him, he still lingered, and turning to Osorchon abruptly exclaimed,

“Boy! thou art high in the favor of thy royal master. Canst thou not influence him more than one he loves not? Though thou art not of Egyptian birth, and therefore cannot understand those feelings which the sons of the Nile imbibe with their first breath,—still thou canst picture to thy heart what are the thoughts and emotions of a lover of his birthland. Say, wilt thou not join me in endeavouring to persuade the King that his best course lies in the acceptance of the services of his nobles on the terms upon which they are offered?”

Osorchon, whose mind had again sunk into contemplation which filled all his senses so that no other image or idea was admissible. looked up confusedly, and stammered,

“Nitocris !”

The noble started. He turned pale and paler yet. Then he spoke, but slowly and with a painful effort,

“Thou art distraught, young Arab!—or hast thou dared to—? But it matters not! My errand is bootless, as I feared. Fare thee well, O Sethos! I, too may say; the Gods preserve thee and enlighten thee! Fare thee well. Our next meeting will be sterner than this; and one where our words may be lost in our death-cries,” And bending to the King, he crossed one hand over his breast, raising the other to his lips; then turned away.

A light step came dancing through the hall; a light touch was laid upon his arm; and Taia, with one hand over her rosy lips to enjoin silence, motioned the noble to follow her.

“The Princess wills it. She wishes to see thee,” she whispered seeing that he lingered.

Psammetichus stood incredulous, fearing to trust to the delicious hope of meeting Nitocris again, and thus. Then he beckoned to the girl to lead the way.

“Here,” said Taia, drawing aside a large

panelled screen of carved ebony which concealed the opening into a private passage.

“And now, Osorchon, for thine Investiture,” said the King, sighing, “and afterwards thou must hasten to Thebes; there to gain all who will follow. The Gods will defend us, though all else fail! Remember the gathering cry is—‘For our country and our Gods—on to Pelusium—bravely forward!’”

CHAPTER VI.

THE DWARF OF MEMPHIS.—THE TRIUMPH OF
PRIDE OVER LOVE.—THE TRIUMPH OF PRIDE
OVER WEAKNESS.

PSAMMETICHUS followed the light step of his guide like one in a dream; while she, keeping her back resolutely turned to him, hastened on, her small feet pattering on the marble like the drops of those sweet showers which sometimes fall in the beautiful Season of Flowers.

Had she not been in this little pettish fit of propriety, many an arch smile and many a bright glance would have beamed and flashed

on the grave noble, and many a saucy challenge would have pouted on those rosy lips, whose slightest curve was the very throne of young Love's kisses. And well the pretty tire-maid knew what eloquent words those smiles and pouting mockeries breathed out. And well she knew the power which a woman's bright and playful mirth—where looks are caresses, and smiles are love-words—has over the hearts of men. Even her present petulance had in it a shade of merriment. Like a child that strikes its nurse with its dimpling hand, while laughing at its bold mischief, she was amused at the slight pain which she could inflict. She was one of those summer birds of life that flit across the path of others, bringing with them a gentle glance of joy, yet leaving neither the depth of blessedness nor the pang of sorrow when fled. Gay things, which one looks on and loves, as one loves the flowers in the hedge-row we pass so swiftly by.

Through lengthy passage and lofty hall—through columned labyrinths of luxurious apartments, where the eye lost itself in a maze of splendour, and grew dazzled with the vividness of their colored capitals and gorgeous roofs—on

they went without let or rest ; till the way began to seem interminable to Psammetichus, and leading only to disappointment. Losing patience, he strode up to Taia, and laying his hand on her rounded shoulder bid her rather peremptorily to stop, while she told him whither their way was tending.

“ My Lord ! ” cried the girl, looking into his face with that peculiar pout of the ripe under lip and arch of the eye-brow, which nature has taught to all coquettes, from the days of the Eight Demi-gods, until now. “ My Lord ! ” she repeated, “ I marvel at thy ways ! Thou hast bruised and nigh broken my shoulder with thy grasp. ”

And putting her hand to her neck, she affected to be in great pain.

“ Tush child ! I did not hurt thee ! ” said Psammetichus kindly, while he endeavoured to soothe the injured part.

“ Thou didst not hurt me ? ” cried the tire-woman, pushing aside his hand. “ Then my bones must be of bronze, for thy grasp could crush the scaly crocodile of Ombos ! Thou hast left thy signet-mark upon my flesh ! I shall not soon be able to forget the hand of the Noble Psammetichus. ”

“ I am sorry that I harmed thee, pretty one ! But thou hast made more lamentation than thou wouldst, hadst thou not wished to revenge thyself in true woman fashion ! ”

“ Thanks for thy courtesy ! ” replied Taia, making a low reverence. “ Thou dost first slay then coolly tell me that thou didst not pain me, and that I am mocking thee the while ! ”

“ But where art thou leading me, maiden ? ” said Psammetichus. “ Art thou playing off any child’s pranks upon me ? I know thee of old, Taia ! And I know that it always gave thy foolish heart especial delight to mislead and torment me ! ”

“ My Lord ! ” again cried Taia, tossing her head indignantly. “ My duties,” she continued, with a pretty assumption of dignity “ my duties to my royal mistress are too many, and too grave to leave me leisure or desire for such mad tricks. The first tire-woman in the train of the Princess Nitocris, must be of more dignified carriage than the hired buffoon ! ”

“ But hear me, maiden, and answer reasonably, if thou canst—for by the Crown of Isis, thou lookest too scant-witted for grave reason !

Art thou really guiding me to the Princess Nitocris? or art thou mocking at my credulity, and punishing me with deception for being so ready to place faith in one as light and giddy as thyself?"

"Are these the choicest flatteries of the noble Psammetichus? A bewitching store thou hast, in good faith! Surely, no maiden throughout the length and breadth of the Land of the Tree, could resist their seductions! Thou art credulous to trust to *me*? Thanks to thy grace! Shall we then return? And when the Lady Nitocris asks me concerning my charge, I must reply to her, 'He refused to credit thy messenger!' Such a speech will earn thee a gorgeous vest or embroidered girdle, spun and worked by herself, as a reward for thy rare gallantry."

"Thou hast the art of making the worse appear the better cause," replied Psammetichus, smiling; "And though thou art even mocking and deluding me, thou art too fair for anger or reproach. Let us proceed. I scarce believe that thou hast spoken truly—but, at least, I will end the adventure! With so sweet a guide to lure me onwards, even disappointment would lose half its bitterness."

“Nay, my Lord, thou owest me more than empty, unmeaning compliments, for thou hast deeply offended me. But ye high-necked nobles deem that we poor maidens, are made for any purposes to which ye choose to put us ! That if ye will to insult, ye may ; and if ye will to flatter and trifle as ye would with mindless children, ye may ; and we are to fold our hands upon our laps, and to receive each with the same thankfulness. Ye ought to think more highly of us ! For the women of the Pure Land, ought to be worthy of, and equal to, their lords ! There,” she muttered to herself, “I have given him my mistress’ last lesson. How will he like it ?”

“I am not one of those who insult ye maiden,” said Psammetichus, very gravely. “I trust that I ever have treated all things young, and fair, and weak, with fitting manly courtesy, and ever used my strength for protection—not oppression.”

Taia, afraid that she had gone too far, and really sorry in her own dear, kind heart if she had wounded the feelings of her companion, stole nearer to him, and looked up in his face with a bright smile such as only she could give. A bright smile that half prayed for

pardon—half granted grace—with a whole army of beauties springing forth from every dimple, and lurking in every shade and curve. She was hastening onward—by his side now—her loose garments even waving against his soldier's armour, when a wild, loud laugh rang through the air, like the scream of a startled vulture, and made both herself and the noble halt and draw back. Uttering a shrill cry she clung to Psammetichus. With the self-abandonment of a child, she hid her face in his bosom, and twined her arms through his. Poor Taia ! thou art very, very frightened ! And yet thou hast enough presence of mind to place thy pretty hands in shy confusion over thy sparkling eyes. Was it to hide a smile or a blush that thou didst cower so closely down ? Wicked Taia ! how much has not nature taught thee !”

The noble was embarrassed, and even distressed. He could not throw off the young maiden who had flung herself upon his bosom for safety ; yet neither did he wish to hold her thus in his arms, as if voluntarily. If she were too fair, for his anger, so was she for his coldness. And he had scarcely been a man, who could have stiffly bade so beautiful a

thing resting against him, to turn elsewhere for support. And yet, what if Nitocris were to come? What, if she were to hear of this strange scene? Then the last blow would be given to all his hopes, and the woman's jealousy would be worse for him than the daughter's indignation.

As these thoughts passed through his mind, a heavy alabaster stool was flung down, and looking towards the spot whence the noise proceeded, he saw a hideous, mis-shapen dwarf at some little distance from them squatting with crossed legs on the floor, and pointing his skinny fingers at them.

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the dwarf, his eldritch voice caught up by every block, and pillar and capital, and flung up to the painted roof, and thrust peering into the corners and angles, where it whirled and whirled about in faint circles—fainter and thinner—until it finally spun itself to silence, and died away to a whispering, like that of goblins in the moonlight. "Ho! ho! ho! what the Lady buys with pain, the damsel gets for nought! Good luck to thy merchandize, fair Lord! I see thou art a liberal seller of thy favor. And yet surely thou oughtest to give the most to the highest bidder! Taia, how didst thou

get that trick of gaining the grace of Psammethicus, the cold and rigid Noble? It is not every woman of the Valley of the Nile—be she even fairer than thy baby self—who could boast of thus hiding in his arms.”

“Who art thou?” asked Psammethicus. “Art thou some shape of Typho? Art thou man or demon?”

“Judge for thyself, brave noble!” cried the dwarf. “I am Tathlyt, the dwarf of Memphis!”

Psammethicus started. That was a name known far and wide through Egypt, though its possessor was never, or but rarely, seen;—known as belonging to a being endowed with supernatural powers—with the knowledge of men’s deeds, and even of their thoughts. Many tales were abroad of his ruthless cruelty—his fiendish ways and fiendish mates, for they said that he had legions of demons ever about him, waiting his beck, and ready to execute his wicked will on all who offended him: demons, the souls of men whose crimes had been too heinous for even the punishment of the Brute Metempsychosis, and who were thus condemned to become the ministers of evil until the Grand Cycle should

return and fashion all things anew. And each evil which they inflicted on others, they felt in-themselves ; yet urged by the raging thirst for sin, they must perforce for ever commit fresh crimes, and give themselves fresh tortures. And thus guilt and its punishment went hand in hand. And men said that Tathlyt, the Memphite Dwarf, was a direct emanation from Typho ; that to him had been given the direction and government of these viewless sons of wickedness. In the midnight hour his voice would be heard by the couch of the sleeper—telling out his secret crimes, and extorting reparation ; or, where this could not be wrung forth—where desperation lent boldness—then inflicting the punishment with his own hands. Often the criminal woke, feeling the long, skeleton fingers creeping about his bared throat ; and hearing a low, serpent-like hiss, detailing aloud the sins which he fondly thought that none had known of, save the dumb air and his own soul. And oft the pale purple mark round the necks of some found lifeless in their unruffled beds, told that Tathlyt had been there, as the messenger from the Dread Forty-Two. Stern as was the reward of murder, such a death as this brought no

inquiry ; but silently was the livid corse consigned to the embalmer, and silently was it placed in the dark catacombs of its fathers. Terrible was the name of Tathlyt in Egypt ! Even the very babe was hushed in affright, if its nurse but whispered that one word. At Memphis he was regarded with veneration as well as fear ; for the Dwarf Deity, Phtha-Sokar, the tutelar god of the royal city, had taken all men of his own image under his peculiar protection, and had endowed them with sanctity. He had come, none knew from whence. Some said that he had been born in the deserts where dwelt the fierce Ishmaelite and his wandering tribes ; others, that he had sprung up on that cursed day when the nation groaned in the darkness of the anniversary of the Birth-day of Typho ; whilst others, again, told how that he had been first seen—a mere shapeless mass—lying at the foot of the statue of Phtha-Sokar, when the sun shone on the awful procession of the Mystic Boat—and gradually assuming the form and features of the pigmy Deity, stood up the creature that he was :—his peculiar creation, sent to call men's waning love back to his shrine in Memphis.

This was the tale which was most believed in

the merchant city ; and repeated by the mouth of the King, it was thus sanctioned by the adoption of the High Priest of Phtha. His dwelling-place was in the palace ; but his person was unknown to its inmates, excepting to Sethos, whose midnight companion and mysterious adviser he often was. To the women, whose private chambers it was said he guarded from danger and intrusion, he was sometimes pleased to shew himself at rare intervals for a moment's view. But though Psammetichus, in former years, had lived in the strictest intimacy with the Grand Hierophant of Memphis, and, in his first months of royalty—with the King of the Two Worlds—as yet he had not once encountered Tathlyt.

Had the Dwarf not come before Psammetichus, with the reputation which he held, his person alone would have been able to inspire the Noble with a certain degree of awe—if not of fear. He was a wild looking being, with a profusion of coarse hair, and a long straggling beard hanging in matted tangles over his face and neck. And it gave a strange look of neglect and uncleanness, among a people so scrupulous as were the Egyptians. This reddish-yellow hair fell over his low,

knobby forehead, and thatched his large, spreading head, like decaying sedge by a river's banks. Here and there a handful had been taken up, without order or method, and roped into thick plaited cables, with the unclipped ends tied up like a brush, as if in caricature of the fashion of the time, which tortured the women's sleek tresses into myriads of straight, artificial strings, instead of allowing them to flow loose and unconfined in a natural veil of waving ringlets. In his large ears were rings of the purest gold—massive hoops, studded with precious stones; but their weight had distorted the ear. His garments were of the same fashion as those worn by the lower orders: a simple tunic descending below the knee, and ending in a fringe. But this tunic was of rich materials, and the linen straps which fastened it round his square shoulders, were embroidered with gold, and bordered with narrow yellow stripes gradually decreasing in width toward the edge. His unsightly feet were shod in gay sandals, the many-coloured laces of which alone seemed to bind into shape the loose skin, which looked as if it would have hung unconnected with the bone, had it not been kept in its place by

means of these bandages. His apish arms glittered with bangles made by the shores of the Sacred River, the dark-blue Ganges; and his fingers were loaded with rings.

The pigmy vaulted off the rug whereon he had placed himself, and bounding through the apartment by a series of uncouth leaps and antics, came close to Psammetichus. He put one hand over his thick lips, and placed the other on his knee, while bending before the noble with an air of deep reverence. But a lurking demon in his red-lidded eyes, and a sarcastic sneer round his coarse mouth belied the humility of his demeanour.

"See! thou hast frightened the maiden!" said Psammetichus, well content to be angry.

"I crave pardon of the damsel!" said Tathlyt. "But methinks Taia knows Tathlyt too well, to shrink thus at his presence. Taia! fair maid! what saith the sentence which is written over the door of thine apartment? Runs it not thus:—'Blessings be upon the indwellers; for the Evil alone need fear?' If thy course be straight, thou needst not fear; not even though the Guardian of thy Chambers appears before thee!"

"What can I do?" murmured Taia, dis-

tractedly. Then loosing her arms from their twine, and turning quickly to the Dwarf, she said, coaxingly, "Tathlyt, thou art wise and good."

"Ha! ha! ha! the asp flatters the Cat of Phrè!" interrupted Tathlyt, laughing boisterously.

"Nay, Tathlyt, this is childish and unworthy of thee. Hear me; I have a prayer to make to thee."

"The Cat of Phrè hath a coat of mud, impenetrable and unmoveable. The kiss and the sting of the asp are alike unfelt."

"Lord! do thou speak to this Intractable," said Taia, almost in tears; appealing to Psammetichus.

"Maiden, bright and fair outside—thou hast oft foul weather in thy giddy heart!" said Tathlyt, stooping with both his hands on his knees, and staring into the eyes of the frightened tiremaid.

Psammetichus lightly touched him.

"Thou dost forget the presence in which thou art standing," he observed with displeasure, all the pride of the noble rushing over his face.

The Dwarf shook his huge, shock head.

“I remember it well enough!” he said. “Thou art Psammetichus, the rebel noble of Sais; and thou art in the palace of thy king.”

“Why hast thou interrupted our course? What is thy will, and with whom? Either with me or the maiden? Speak it out, and begone!”

“My will is to know why thou art here, O Psammetichus!” replied the Dwarf, suddenly assuming a grave tone of rebuke, and looking full at the soldier. “What business hast thou here in the palace of Sethos, whom thou thyself hast made thy foe? In the very heart of his home—penetrating to the most secret parts—say, why thou art doing this? Thy way from the Private Apartment where thou hast just been—and where thou didst lose thy self-command, and thy dutiful respect to the sovereign—lay through the Porch. And the Porch looks upon the Street of Lions; it doth not lead to the women’s peculiar quarter.”

“What hast thou to do with my steps, slave?” cried Psammetichus, angrily.

“I am the guardian of these rooms, and their inmates,” laughed Tathlyt. “And suffer

nothing unseemly to take place within, or around them. Judge, thyself, noble sir! if thou wouldst love to see an enemy in thine own dwelling—wandering about, none may tell whither. And yet art thou not thus prowling through the dwelling of the king? By what right? Did Sethos bid thee go visit his daughter? He would hardly bid the crested viper watch over the pigeon's purple-winged brood! He had hardly sent the noble Psammetichus, Chief of the Malcontents, to hide in the chamber of the Princess Nitocris!"

Psammetichus bit his lip till the blood dyed his tooth, then answered;

"Thou hast put a near question, and one which I can best answer by silence. Yet the knowledge that I am a noble and a soldier ought to quell thy suspicions."

"A noble and a soldier? Ha! Yet apes bite, and lions slay; and I had rather provoke the wrath of both, than cross the path of Egypt's Noble Soldiery!"

"If so, then do thou go on thy way, and let me depart on mine."

"Thou art wise and crafty, Lord! but thou art not overwise for Tathlyt! I have met thee—I have disconcerted thee—and now I

will follow thee, and see the end. Nay!" he added, shrinking as he saw the angry spot on the noble's cheek, and glanced at his uplifted hand. "Thou wilt never strike an old man, and a weak? Where is thy manliness, and thy pride? For Psammetichus to strike the Dwarf of Memphis, would sound ill for his nobleness, though well—thou thinkest—for his freedom from superstition."

"But thou dost merit it for thine insolence," returned Psammetichus. "Taia, what wilt thou that I shall do with this man—if man he may be called?"

"Oh! nought! nought!" whispered Taia. "Thou dost forget that he is not only a Dwarf, and under the protection of the Great Phtha, but that he hath also supernatural powers, and if we offend him, can smite us to the dust with one glance of his Evil Eye. They say that he hath an army of fiendish spirits ever with him, who at a hint or gesture from him, will torture to the death all who enrage him. Thou hadst best leave him, Lord! The Seahorse is snared through his fancied security, and thou mayst be lost through thy boldness."

"Tush, Maiden! a truce to these idle fol-

lies. What can an army of bodiless spirits do against man's living strength?"

"Psammetichus is wise, and free from the weaknesses of commoner men," said the Dwarf with something of an admiring look. "But perchance he hath never seen the beauteous palm grove, which the evening sun kissed when she slept, stand, in the dawn, a mass of blackened and charred rafters—for Tathlyt had passed through? And perchance he hath never seen the fair maid the father loved, and of whom the mother had made the casket of her life's treasures, pine, sicken, and die—for Tathlyt had gazed upon her? But I will appeal to another feeling than craven fear. See! thou art a warrior, and a mighty man—I am a cripple and a weakling. Thou wouldst not harm such an one for doing his master's will, and obeying his behests, in guarding the dear flock? The noble indulges his desire in roaming, unbidden, through the king's palace, why may not the Dwarf do so likewise, in following his steps? The one commits a greater fault than that of mere intrusion; the other hath the right and privilege of his office to warrant his espial."

Psammetichus smiled.

“Thou knowest the heart well, friend!” he said. “Thou hast called on the manliness of Psammetichus, and such a call is ever answered. Thou mayst not arrest my steps, but thou mayst follow as thou wilt. Neither thine, nor the eyes of any one, shall look on my ways and find in them aught unworthy of an Egyptian noble. Do thy will for me!”

“No! no!” exclaimed Taia, hurriedly. “This must not be! I have a small boon to ask of thee—but a small one, dear Tathlyt! Leave us now. Hereafter thou shalt know all. Good Tathlyt, grant me this prayer. Why needst thou follow, thou who knowest all things? Thou hast but to will it, and thy spirit can pass through every barrier, and look on all that passes within the most secret hiding place. So they say of thy powers! Dear, wise Tathlyt, leave us now.”

“The crocodile lies on the sand,” said Tathlyt in a wild, chanting voice, snapping his fingers, and beating the palms of his hands together, in time to the measure. “The smooth ichneumon comes, and bids him open his mouth and sleep. ‘Sleep! sleep! The sun is

warm and the winds are dead. The lazy air from the still waters forgets to blow. Sleep! for it is sweet in this noonday's heat. Ho! my brave foe, thou art caught! Now I am within thy terrible jaws; now I glide down; and now I gnaw my way through thy body. And thou must die, because I, soft-speeched ichneumon, bade thee open thy mouth and sleep. Oh foolish strength! that trusting in its own superiority lets the weaker first lull, then conquer! Of what advantage was it to the crocodile, Taia, to know that he had been deceived with fair speeches and apparent friendliness, after Death had stalked in? To foreknow is the best. Therefore I will follow ye both now, and thou needst not tell me hereafter. If thou art not doing wrong, my presence need not alarm thee: but if thou art meditating evil, the sooner thou art stayed, the better! Come! lead the way; I will follow thee without being fettered to thy side with thy scarlet girdle. Scarlet:—thy garment's edges are of the flame colour, and thy lotus-necklace blushes with the crimson dye of the sun; the fringe around thy straying feet—the stripes that border thy floating robe—

the fillet that binds thy glossy hair—all have the same hue. What means the colour, maid? Shall I whisper it to thee? Treachery!”

“Nay!” cried Psammetichus kindly, “thou dost give the merry tirewoman credit for deeper thoughts and deeper meanings than ever passed through her childlike mind. She has but adopted the colour of witchery the better to adorn her bright brow. The dazzling tint of her favorite hue agrees well with the sunshine that breathes around her. Thou art overwise in thy suggestion, Tathlyt.”

“The mighty Dwarf of Memphis puts his superhuman knowledge to but a mean purpose, when he condescends to find a reason for the colour of a tiremaid’s girdle!” said Taia pettishly.

“Nought is too low, and nought is too high for Tathlyt’s vision,” replied the dwarf significantly. “But we lose time. Forward, Taia! The noble and I will tread in thy track. Haste thee, girl. Dost thou think life so long, that its precious hours may be wasted, and never missed from the boundless storehouse of its years?”

“Thou shalt not follow!” cried Taia, almost beside herself with despair and anger.

“Hush!” whispered the dwarf, covering his mouth with his hand, as the noise of a closing door sounded through the air, and the steps of men were heard clanking on the marble hall, through which the noble and his fair guide had lately passed, “I hear the King!” Then, after a moment’s silence, when the echoes of the feet had gone, and all was still, he burst into a wild and boisterous laugh, and exclaimed;

“Well! go ye now in peace to the chamber of Nitocris. I care not to witness the first part of the interview. But I will send Sethos in my stead, to enjoy the show!”

Taia caught his arm,

“Stay! stay! good Tathlyt!” she cried, clinging to him with all her force, “what madness art thou not about to commit!”

“Thou wouldst not have me, when I would, and now that thou wouldst, I will not. Thou knowest that men call me Tathlyt, the Incomprehensible! We shall soon meet again, Psammetichus! And Taia, my bright-eyed maid, mayhap the executioner will be the interpreter between thee and me at our next conference. The fair daughters of the Pure Land are oft chastised;—why not then, Taia, handmaid of

the Princess? Beware !” and, so saying, he darted from them, and leapt through the chamber with the same apish gestures as before ; running between and amongst the pillars, and peeping from out behind them with hideous grimaces ; stopping often to point his long fingers with derision at the pair. With a shrill yell he at length disappeared ; and Psammetichus himself seemed to breathe more freely when he was gone.

“ He is a fearful being !” shuddered Taia, and knows all that happens, not only in this palace, but throughout wide Egypt ! He has indeed an awful knowledge ! And I fear that he is cruel—although I myself have never known, for certain, of one evil thing that he has done ! I doubt not that he will tell Sethos the King, as he threatened ; and then, woe both to thee and to me !”

“ I am beyond the King’s power !” replied Psammetichus proudly. “ But I should grieve if thou, poor girl, come to any harm through me, however indirectly I might be the cause ! The Princess is safe from the anger of her father ? He never chid his young dove in olden times ; he would hardly do so now, when each hour adds some new grace, or brings

into the light some new beauty that had been hidden in the shrine of girlhood's timidity. But let us to her footstool. We have spent too much time already in this senseless converse with yonder dwarf!"

"True! true!" cried the maiden, darting forward like a bird loosened from its string.

She skimmed through a long side corridor, then through another chamber like that in which they had been detained by Tathlyt, and after this was passed, she halted before a door of highly polished ebony, which was inlaid with ivory, and painted with colours and gold. On the architrave was written this inscription; "Isis, Mother of the Earth, spread thy guardian wings around this cradle of Peace!" The two tapering, graceful pillars, between which the door swung, were the beautiful palm-tree pillars. The shafts were formed like the stem, while the capitals were moulded into the foliage, of that dear child of the sun. The square and massive bases bore the royal figures of a lion with an asp springing from its side, surmounted by the Staff of Purity.

Taia cautiously withdrew the large wooden pin which served as a lock, and opening the door, silently motioned the noble in. He en-

tered. It was a small room—smaller than any of those through which he had been led; but the marble floor brought from the quarries of Alabastron,—the gorgeously painted ceiling,—the luxurious rugs and carpets of Memphis,—the gilded furniture of the rarest foreign woods,—the large vases of the true and the false murrhine,—the cups and bottles of pictured glass, each a labyrinth of scrolls and leaves encircling some figure of bird or beast, wrought to life-like beauty,—all told that it belonged to one of high place. Whilst the delicate work-basket of the lithe byblus—the ivory frame for weaving and embroidering—the seven-stringed lute which rested against a tall vase filled with starry flowers—and newly gathered lotus necklaces hanging on their carved stands,—told likewise that it belonged to a woman, and a woman of graceful and refined tastes.

And Nitocris, the Mistress of this Cradle of Peace, stood in the midst of the apartment,—her anxious looks rivetted on the door.

The heart of Psammetichus beat loud and high, and the blood rushed over his brow. In the chamber of Nitocris—standing where her dear feet had so often pressed—about him the

same air which had swept round her beauty—viewing the things which her glance had glorified, and her touch had hallowed—nay, more, feeling the warm breath of her parted lips fan over his, and hearing the music of this deep-drawn breath—before her,—in her presence—what luxury ! what bliss ! Painful, from their intensity, were the noble's feelings of delight. He bent his knee, and, taking her hand, pressed it to his lips :—

“ Nitocris ! beautiful and noble Nitocris ! ” he murmured in almost suffocated tone.

Nitocris hung over him. Her hands, with their slender fingers entwined, were pressed on her heaving bosom ; and her large dewy eyes, filled with unutterable tenderness, were raining down their full showers of love upon him. Gently as a young mother hangs over her first born, she bent over the kneeling man. She gazed long and kindly. Her pride was hushed to sleep, and her coldness wept itself away. The Princess, the Egyptian, and the daughter, were forgotten, and the loving woman stood there alone.

Psammetichus dared not raise his eyes. He knelt with his head bowed to the ground. Ah ! had he but once gazed up into that dear face—so eloquent now his deep thoughts, and so un-

guarded in its exposure of the weakness within—heart to heart, and hand in hand, they had found each other, and had not again been parted. But he dared not look up. And the partition-wall of pride, and opposing duties, which had been for a moment thrown down by overwhelming tenderness, once more rose up between them.

A start—a hurried sigh—the blood all congealing round her heart for terror and for shame—her lips pale—her eyes darker, with a ray of anguish darting from them, and a sharp searching look to discover whether her weakness had been beheld or no,—then, swift, wild blushes mantling over her cheek and bosom—and Nitocris, with her stately form raised to its full height, was again the haughty, unapproachable, and unmoved Idol of Beauty.

“Psammetichus,” she said, but her voice trembled in spite of her cold eye and proud mien “thy place is not here at my feet. I pray thee to rise. This reverence is excessive and unseemly.”

Psammetichus sprang to his feet with the writhe of a stung lion—his nostrils were dilated and his strong chest heaved.

“Nitocris!” he cried, “This voice?—this air? Will nothing move thee? Wilt thou

for ever look on me so coldly and so sternly ? Oh ! where is thy woman's heart ? In what Lake of Death hast thou drowned its tenderness ? I could nigh weep that thou hast so ruthlessly destroyed the fair flower of love !”

“ My Lord, I besought thy presence, not for such scenes as these. The reasons which were weighty enough to make Nitocris forget her place and dignity, were not that she might listen to unmeaning flatteries, or reply to mad ravings,” and she turned away abruptly.

Psammetichus did not see the look of pain that blanched her cheek, nor did he hear the sigh that seemed to burst from the very depths of her soul.

“ It is well, lady,” he began in a constrained voice. “ For long months thou hast spurned me with pride and contempt. But it must end. I, too, have a higher part in life to play, than that of thankless slavery to a woman, even the fairest that ever drew breath ! And now say, what is thy need with me ? Aught that the Princess Nitocris wills to demand of the noble, shall be hers—if it may be granted. See, I forget not the several degrees of our several ranks !” he added, bitterly. “ I have

had wild dreams—but this madness hath happily been spared me. I forget not that thou art the Princess of Egypt, and I, but a disgraced noble ; an impoverished soldier, whom it has pleased thy sire to thus beggar and dishonor ! We stand not now in the same positions, as when thou wert the priest's daughter, and I the first noble in the Land of Khem. To the one hath been granted a power by which the other has become degraded."

"I need not answer thy taunts," replied Nitocris, gravely. "Thine own heart, in cooler hours, will upbraid and condemn thee ! But I will tell thee why I desired thy presence here, alone, in my private chamber. Methinks such a mark of confidence ought to have ensured thy respect and tender dealing ! But it matters not : I have been once again disappointed in my expectations, and have not found the nobleness which I looked for. Art thou of my father's army ?"

"I was," answered Psammetichus, with an effort, after a long pause.

"Thou wert ! That word bodes ill, my Lord ! Thou wert, and thou art not now ? Is it thus ?"

“It is. I am not the soldier of Sethos !”

“And why ? How dost thou dare to look upon the eye of the sun, and look—a rebel ? How dost thou dare to lie down in the midnight stillness, and trust thyself to the keeping of those gods whom thou hast offended, angered, and injured throughout the day ? Thou saidst that my father did disgrace thee. Nay—nay, Psammetichus ! Thou, thyself, art the executioner of thine own honor—and thou, thyself, hast dealt the death-blow to thy fame. The deprivation of a few privileges, could never have dishonored a nobleman ; but the turning from good to evil—the forsaking the altar of Neph for that of Typho—this, it is, that could degrade even the swine-herd ! And dost thou still walk through streets of Memphis, and dost thou still breathe the air of the Nile—and art all the while lost, defamed, apostate ?”

And the eyes of Nitocris flashed through their large tears.

“I knew not that I was to be thus schooled,” answered the noble, “else would I have learnt my lesson better.”

“Forgive me,” said Nitocris, coldly, ‘I

fear that I have trusted too much to the kind indulgence of Psammetichus. I know that such matters belong not to me. But I deemed that, perchance, a daughter's anxiety and a woman's fears, might plead my excuse, for thus overstepping the closely-drawn bounds of a woman's place. If thou dost not love those simple questions—which it pleases thee to name schooling—thou art free to depart."

"My duty is to obey the king's daughter, in as far as her commands war not with mine honor," returned Psammetichus, bowing, and crossing one hand over his breast as an inferior, while he retreated a few steps backward.

Nitocris gave one long look from under her forest of black lashes. A look of anger, pity, and affection commingled, then she turned away.

"At least, thou art my father's friend?" she said, at length.

"I am not his friend, lady. The king and I have met for the last time."

"Do I hear aright?" cried Nitocris. "Thou, a personal foe of Sethos? Thou? Psammetichus?"

“ My hand is not with the Pontiff-King, lady.”

“ Then against him ! Oh ! how couldst thou thus desert thy monarch, and thine ancient friend in his need ? I knew, indeed, that thou wert one of those who murmured at his decree ; and I thought that the pride, which deems its own insulted dignity the grandest event of life, might keep thee for some short time from joining with the royal troops ; but I also thought that delay, like a woman’s feigned denial, was meant only to enhance the price of thy return and consent. And thou hast calmly deserted thy trust, and left thy country to perish, and thy king to die ? ”

“ My poor aid given, or withheld, is nought,” answered Psammetichus, gloomily. “ And is it not natural for the soldiers of the land to say that Sethos must know their worth better, and reward them more justly, ere they will peril their all for him ? It is no light thing, maiden, to give our whole of strength, and our whole of love, for the wages of oppression and scorn ! ”

“ My father prizes thee, Psammetichus ! ” returned Nitocris, eagerly ; “ I have oft heard

him speak, of late, lovingly of thee. Yea, and that, too, since thou hast taken part with the discontented nobles. Let not the fancy that thou art not valued weigh with thee ! It is false ! Indeed, indeed, thou mayst believe my words ! My father loves thee, Psammetichus, as he always loved thee !”

“ Prizes me ? Loves me ? Nay, in truth I think not ! As little as his daughter prizes or loves her childhood’s friend !”

“ Does Psammetichus ever taunt, instead of answer ? I tell thee once and again, that this theme is foreign to my purpose ! I wished thy presence, not to recal that which never can return, and which had best be buried in silence and forgetfulness, but simply to learn if thou wert still true to thy country—I will not say to thy king, since that name so displeases thee. Thou art false ; and I beseech thee to turn again into the right path, ere error has hardened into crime !”

“ Nitocris, thou beseech me ?”

“ For thine honor’s sake—for the weal of thy birth-land—for thy place in the Dread Day, and for the sentence of the fearful Assessors !”

“For thyself—?” said the noble, breathlessly, bending forward with clasped hands.

“Nought,” replied Nitocris, casting down her eyes, and turning aside her head to conceal the quivering of her lips. “To myself, thy decision will be nothing,” she added, with unnatural calmness.

“I am bound by an oath not to take up arms with Sethos, unless he repair the evil which he hath done,” said Psammetichus, slowly; and unconsciously laying his hand upon his heart, to still its throbbing.

“And my prayer is powerless?”

“It must be so.”

“And thou wilt not defend the altars, nor the helpless maidens of the Pure Land? Thou wilt rather give them up into the keeping of the Gentile?”

And the voice of Nitocris sunk into the music of a strange, sweet sadness, whilst she looked into the eyes of the Noble.

Psammetichus remained silent, and gazed steadfastly at the maiden. He took her hand. She let it lie passive in his grasp. And thus they stood, their pulsing fingers beating toge-

ther, and the thoughts understood by each of their hearts.

“Nitocris,” he then began, “thou knowest how I love thee. Thou knowest that I would give my life--not only for thine--each man whose form does not belie his nature, would do that—but I would peril it to win one faintest smile of approval from thee! But I likewise love my virtue; and I would not forfeit it for the richest treasure which life holds in her hand. Nay not even for the treasure of love! Sethos has been an oppressor to me, and to my brethren. For myself, had I been the sole sufferer—I had cared nothing. But I cannot aid him in the oppression of Egypt’s noblest sons! And patriotism must conquer love. Yet my heart is not unmoved. I loved thee in first youth, when the dawn of manhood was not yet upon my smooth lip—when the sun brightened over thee, a happy child; as I had loved thee in the early dawn I loved thee in the full day, when thy soul had awakened from its sleep of infancy. I love thee still; yet I anger; yet I deny. And holding fast by stern duty, I must hide my face from the beautiful allurements of love, and devote myself to death, rather than to those, and perjury!”

Nitocris tore away her hand.

"Thy speech is an insult!" she cried. "Thy love is a mockery, and only a barren word—a phrase to be cunningly used, as a mask for rebellion to every holiest law of the Gods! Thou lovest none but thyself! Thinkest thou, too, that the daughter of the royal Sethos, will list to such words as these from his enemy? Ha! thou little knowest the heart of her thou wouldst woo by insult to herself, and wrong to her father!"

Psammetichus attempted to speak.

"Peace! peace!" she exclaimed wildly. "Let me not hear thy voice again! Our conference is over; and thou art free to depart. Mad, that I was, to dream that the wishes of a helpless maiden, though that maiden were the Princess Nitocris, could influence one so given up to selfishness."

"Nitocris! thou knowest not thy words," said Psammetichus, gently.

Nitocris burst into a passionate, unrestrained flood of tears.

"Oh! what do I say! what do I say!" she cried, "I truly know myself no longer! Psammetichus, leave me! Oh! leave me—if thou didst ever love me—leave me now."

She sunk into a chair, and covering her face with her hands, sobbed aloud.

The Noble flung himself at her feet.

"Here, at thy footstool," he said, his manly voice trembling, "here will I stay, nor rise till thou givest me thy pardon. I will not name mine own love, but I will name that of thy dead mother. She cradled the orphaned child of her friend on that same bosom, whereon, a few years after, she cradled thee, her own dear offspring. Thy mother, thy sweet mother loved me, Nitocris. For her sake then pardon me. And yet thou turnest away in coldness from the son of her adoption, while I kneel in love to the child of her heart."

Nitocris had become calmer. She looked at the Noble.

"For my mother's sake," she whispered. And she laid her hand upon his shoulder, bending her head till her long hair swept his forehead.

"And thou wilt not love thine early playmate, Nitocris?"

"Hush! hush!" she said, trembling. "That word may never be spoken between us twain. That sun hath sunk in the dark

west, never to rise more. My mother ! O my gentle, beloved mother !”

“ Aye ! call on her name, daughter of Sethos ! Call, till the breath of her lovely spirit softens the father’s sternness in thy heart. Call, till some of the love which she felt for the boy chained in sweet lily bands to her laughing infant, comes to thy soul. Thy mother, Nitocris, would have wept sorely over this fearful cloud between two, she destined should love each other !”

“ Let the past rest in peace,” said the Princess, rising and gathering strength and coldness as she proceeded. “ With the days of childhood flee also its loves and duties. Thou art now the Chief Noble of Egypt—and at war with her King. Can then, that King’s daughter be aught unto thee, but a stranger ? Blame not my coldness, where the fault lies with thy departure from virtue. Return to thy duty ere thou namest affection. Give the first place to the holiest feeling. Wilt thou amend thy fault, Psammetichus—dear Psammetichus ? Oh ! if thou but publicly profess thyself the friend of Sethos, thou wilt bring to his aid the whole of those who now oppose him. Psammetichus, wilt thou not

hear my voice? Wilt thou not grant a prayer made thus?" And she laid her clasped hands upon his shoulder, and looked into his face with a smile, and a tear, at once, upon her lip and her cheek.

"It may not be!" returned Psammetichus, speaking as one in extreme pain. "My vow is recorded, and my word is pledged. And even were it not so, my sword could never be drawn, nor my chariots led forth, in the service of one who deals unjustly to my brethren. Oh! it is a frightful time when we can thus dare to speak of the Monarch-priest,—when we can thus dare to cast aside all the child-honored reverence for the people's father, for the oracle of the Gods, for the Anointed and Blessed, and boldly proclaim ourselves rebels to his law, and judges of his conduct! A spell is over the land! Yet, still I say, let Sethos rescind his decree, and Psammetichus will be the first to pay him homage, and give him aid. Oh! why wilt thou madden me by thy prayers, and thy witcheries, when they must be useless?" he added passionately. "Cruel! cruel maid! why dost thou so delight to torture me? O Gods! my brain is on fire! Nitocris! thou hast slain me!"

And every limb of the stout-hearted soldier quivered.

“ Then fare thee well !” said Nitocris, taking her hands from his shoulder, and speaking with indifference. “ If the Assyrian soldier makes of the yet bleeding corse of Nitocris, his footstool to help his further pillage—shed one tear, not for her fate, but thine own misdeeds ! Now fare thee well ! I cannot bid thee ‘ good luck,’ for thy fortune will be the enslaving of Egypt, and the downfall of my father ; and thy prosperity will grave my own tomb !”

She folded her arms and stood erect and still as some beautiful statue.

Psammetichus turned sorrowfully away. His hand on the lock, he looked once more. But the light from the unclosed window, streaming over her like a glory, showed only the unmoved eye and haughty lip of a high-set goddess, indifferent in her lofty calmness to the woes or the pleasures of men. Her head was slightly thrown back ; and its rich clusters of jetty tresses fell heavily upon her bosom, which rose and fell with each breath, as tranquilly as a sleeping babe’s. Her whole air and attitude spoke only of a majestic composure, not to be

disturbed by any earthly passion. A mighty effort for a heart so full! Psammetichus lingered still. Slowly she turned her eyes upon him—like the eyes of an antelope at bay—and essayed to speak. But in vain. Words would have only been articulate tears; and she must be still.

“And we part thus?” he said.

She waved her hand:—and he closed the door.

Tathlyt sprang forward and led him hastily away. On the threshold of a private gate, which opened into the Grand Dromos of Lions, he halted, and said:—

“Thanks Tathlyt, this time, for thy safety! I delayed thee so long in the chamber with my foolish ways, and, it might seem to thee, insolent provokings, because Sethos and Osorchon had passed by a nearer way into the apartment of the Princess. And the one is a father, and thy foe; the other an Ishmaelitish lover of hot blood. If he were wont to brook little while a poor, friendless youth from thee, his elder, and superior, and master, what will he do now, when about to be raised to thy peculiar privileges of affection? Nay, never start! Nitocris cannot love *him*.” The Dwarf

laid his hand on the Noble's arm, and with a sweet smile that lighted up his hideous features into positive beauty, he pressed it warmly. "Psammetichus, noble heart!" he added, "fear nothing. Thy glorious path is straight, and it must lead to good! And though thy days of mourning are many and dark, and thy burdens hard to bear, courage, and look up! Tathlyt, the Dwarf of Memphis, hath an evil name through the land; but if thou dost ever need a friend—one, firm, and staunch, and true—one, who will dare and do all that man may—then remember the demon-shaped being whom thou hast met this day, for the first, but not for the last time! To the sinful, alone, am I a terror and a scourge. To such as thou—noble and brave! am I a helper and guide! Fear nothing! Thy Sun of Glory is dimmed, but not quenched. It shall soon burst forth again, and thou shalt be glad in his beams!" And lifting the soldier's hand to his lips he kissed it fervently; then kissing his own, as was the custom when it was the saluter's wish to show great reverence, he disappeared, pointing as he went to the Paved Way, as the Noble's path.

Who could read the heart of Nitocris?

Still, colder, prouder than ever, she seated herself at her embroidery frame, and worked calmly. And when Taia, at her request, sang to the lute a bright mesh of gay words, she looked up from her task and smiled sweetly, as if in gladness. But tears stood in Taia's eyes.

"The hawk-headed sphynx is the emblem of our faith, they say, for that both are alike mysteries," she thought. "It is a better emblem of Nitocris, who is a riddle which the wisest could not read! The noble Psammetichus! the brave and handsome man! I thought that she loved him! And Osorchon, too—the warm young boy, whose very glance cheers the heart like sweet music, and whose presence is like a bright flower in the Season of the Water-plants—both she repulses with the same unbending haughtiness! Beautiful young Osorchon! Ah! why will he only love where he is scorned? Can he not find some other bosom whereon he might lay his head, and rest? Alas!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE THREE THEBAN DANCING GIRLS.—THE
FOREIGN STOIC.—CHEBRON THE SCRIBE, AND
BOCCHORIS THE NOBLE.

IN a large and luxuriously furnished room, sat, or rather reclined, on long low couches—half buried in their soft cushions and enveloped in their painted hangings—three girls of the most exquisite shape and beauty. A peculiarity of dress, expression, and demeanour, bespoke them professors of a different mode of life to that one of staid and grave modesty

characteristic of the Egyptian women. There was a freedom in their glances, and a voluptuousness in their gestures, which have ever been the distinguishing marks of the maiden followers of the dance and the song. Their dress, of the lightest materials, scarcely concealing the form it covered, fell to their feet in loose gauzy folds,—now wafting into a kind of cloud-like misty envelope, through whose white haze the shrouded figure was but dimly visible, like the flower seen at twilight—now clinging tight, revealing each faint motion of the well-formed limbs, as the silver-ankled maidens bounded through the air. Their hair was plaited into a profusion of narrow strings, secured in two larger clusters and tied together at the ends with cords ornamented with small blue and gold balls; and this was one distinguishing mark of their calling.

About the chamber were strewn various musical instruments. Here lay a double pipe of box-wood, with the ivory mouth-piece set round with emeralds, and the whole instrument highly carved and ornamented. There was a lyre of four chords, turned into the shape of a gazelle; the case inlaid with ivory and ebony in alternate squares, like a tessellated

pavement; while inlaid in turn upon these, were narrow strips of gold, forming a pattern of volutes and scrolls. By the side of the lyre was a pair of small hollow wooden cymbals, or crotala, the leathern thongs of which were richly embroidered with silver and many-coloured threads, to make them more fit for the gentle hands of the dainty minstrels; and a little farther off stood a harp, surmounted by a beautifully carved female head, intended to represent the Foreign Athor, the too-lovely Helen of Troy. Beneath a large chair, and playing with a ball, lay a small Indian goat, with its long soft hair glistening like the silks of Serica, and its bright eyes gazing up with a languid expression; a monkey chattered on a spacious frame, or perch; and reposing on a square rug, slept a stealthy, crafty ichneumon. The furniture of the room was luxurious in its character, though not costly. The woods were of native growth; the gilding but in small portions; the stuffs with which the double chairs, and low couches and stools, were covered, were not of the best manufacture, though their bright colours and graceful disposition amply compensated for their want of intrinsic value; the small, square, or oblong

carpets were not from the best looms of the Memphite or Theban workman, not to speak of their being the produce of the distant Lydian, as was usual with the richer classes ; but they were in great numbers, and piled up in most pleasurable places of repose.

The maidens themselves were dazzling with glittering trinkets. Round their swelling waists were zones of beads, and small bells that tinkled as they moved, and served as harmonious symphonies or accompaniments, clashing in time to the measure of the music, and to the speed or slowness of the dance. Gold and precious stones from the emerald mines and the mines of Ethiopia, were twined among the glossy braids of their raven hair---glistening there like stars through the darkness of the night. Collars encircled their smooth throats ; chains rested on their soft necks ; bands circled their arms, and rings kissed each taper, rosy finger ; while anklets clanked musically as they walked. Their hands and feet, stained with a deep rose colour, blushed like pink lily buds, or the blossoms of the Indian sweet-scented malati, when the sunshine first wakens them to life and love. Their large lustrous eyes were made still more beautiful, by the aid

of the black powder with which the lids were tinged, and their full, richly red lips looked more lovely from the dark shade which was on the short and curved upper lip. They lay on their couches, the three most beauteous of all the beauteous Theban dancing girls: the three fairest of a band where each was fair as a very incarnation of the Spirit of Beauty.

Not niggardly, or careless, either, were they of their charms; for each separate little grace was heightened and added to by all the various helps of art, which the sweet women of the Pure Land so well knew. Boxes filled with mysterious powders,---black and rose-colour, for the eye and the lip; bottles, from whence streamed out a rich flood of fragrance: covered porcelain cups, in which were compounds that made the soft skin softer still; scented oils and essences for the silken hair and the wearied body;---all such as these did the sweet women of Egypt heap up in that sacred spot where the work of female embellishment went on. And glancing in their broad metal mirrors, they would close their labours with woman's brightest, sweetest smile,---her smile of self-approval. And none knew better, and none practised more, these many arts, than did the Three Dancing girls

of Thebes. Lovely they would have been even in the beggar's coarse rags; but now, when adorned with all the artificial charms of their age, they moved and looked the very perfection of Egyptian allurements. Who could refuse that admiration which the soft glance asked?—who could withhold that kiss which the dewy lip seemed to challenge, as it pouted forth its sweet smiles? Those rosy fingers, hanging like the crimson berries of the chaplet-ivy,—did they not eloquently, though mutely, with their soft touch and graceful beckonings invite the hand's caress? Did not the glancing feet's sweet music claim the kneeling lover's adoring kiss, as they came about him like silver-winged birds, breathing odour and harmony as they trode? Ah yes—wide Egypt held not one man of heart so cold, or virtue so stern, that he could have looked upon these maidens, and turned away! To see them and to love was the penalty which they inflicted on their patrons and admirers.

“How much did that stranger Barbarian give to thee, Berenice?” said one, the tallest and eldest, rising from her place and walking with a graceful majesty to where her companion lay nestled in a heap of cushions.

"Why, Isenofra! thou art getting a very usurer;" yawned Berenice, lazily opening her eyes.

"In truth thou art too indolent!" replied Isenofra, with a grave look of reproof. "I only wonder that thou keepest the smallest agility of step, with this unceasing drowsiness. Wake, child! Thy lover, Zminis, will be with thee soon;—wilt thou give him slumber as his only welcome?"

"I will wake when he comes!" said Berenice, drawling with a long slow accent, as if these few words were almost too many for her to repeat.

"But the moment is at hand when the stranger bade us await and expect him. The sun hath gone down behind the mountains, and the water clock hath told of its departure for this long hour. In less time will it tell of the Barbarian's arrival."

"And when it hath told the very moment, then I will arise," answered the maiden more slowly still.

"Berenice, arouse thee now?" urged Isenofra, impatiently. "I want thee to dance with me. Our new dance, child—thou hast not learnt it yet? The last play—the unerring aim

with the arrowy reed—thou hast not made thyself mistress of it? Thou wouldst not fail before a stranger; and so shame the maids of the Land of Khem in the eyes of a Gentile?"

"Dear Isenofra," said Berenice, in a bewailing tone, and raising her head for a moment. "If thou dost find thine excessive activity too great for thyself alone—go, bestow its superabundance upon Eirene. She never sleeps no more than thyself. But pray thee leave me in peace. Why wilt thou for ever disturb my rest? Thou art worse than the Fly of Athyr with its buzzing sting!"

"I disturb thee, because I approve not of sloth, child."

"And I love ease," said Berenice.

"Thou dost disgrace our profession," pursued the other. "Thou oughtest to be all grace, activity, and lightness, and thou canst do nought but lie on a couch and sleep away thy years; thy waking itself but a dream!"

"Dream!"

"Yea, Berenice! a dream, I warrant me, of thy Blessed Abode hereafter; which, to be a Blessed Abode for thee, must be as a cup of

the *Nepenthes*—containing unbroken sleep and unbroken idleness.”

“Methinks, then, that thou art determined not to give me a foretaste of it here,” said the girl complainingly, turning away her warm rounded cheek with an expression of helpless distress.

“And thou wouldst go nigh to make any one believe that thou hadst steeped thy soul in the opiate; or else hadst drowned thought energy and feeling together, in too copious draughts from the wine-filled *amphoræ*.”

“Thou art slanderous with thine energy,” said Berenice, yawning.

“Come, Eirene! we will leave this sluggard to her dear pillow; and do thou and I practise our games and dances, for the amusement of our noble patrons. We will not gain their gold for nought, but will honorably give them that for which they pay so heavy a price.” Isenofra cried, looking indignantly at the sleepy-eyed maid.

“Dear Isenofra,” said Berenice, as she again established herself luxuriously and comfortably. “Thou wilt get an aged woman before thy years. Thou seemest ignorant of that best preservative of bright eyes and fresh looks—repose;

and unwittingly thou gravest a new wrinkle on thy brow, with each hour thou livest!"

And {having said this almost energetically, she drew over her face a transparent, embroidered handkerchief, and feigned to sleep. Looking the perfect creature of voluptuous softness;—careless of the wrath which this obstinate luxuriousness kindled in the breast of the excitable Isenofra--and only praying that either Zminis her lover, or the Stranger Barbarian would come while she lay thus; convinced that if lovely in any attitude, she was loveliest in this: if alluring in any occupation—most alluring in idleness.

Eirene, a small and exquisitely formed thing with limbs buoyant as a bird's, leaped from her couch lightly as a dancing fay from the edge of a lily-bell, and bounded rather than ran to Isenofra, in obedience to her call. And her fresh cool lips laughed merrily, and her beaming eyes glanced like twin-stars, as she bent before her eldest sister in mock reverence. Then going up to Berenice she twined her little hands all through the long plaits lying on the maiden's downy cheek, and slily pulled off their fastenings, till the hair, so neatly arranged and so care-

fully braided, fell in a loose, unordered mass. Much more bewitching and beautiful looked Berenice with her cloudy veil, than when the silken bands were so primly bound; but to the formal Egyptian taste her tresses seemed unnatural luxuriance.

“Poor Berenice,” cried Isenofra, who stood watching Eirene’s mischief, truth to say, not over-displeased. “She loves her ease even better than the favour of the gallant Zminis !”

“Nay,” drawled Berenice, from the depth of her cushions. “I love Zminis the best of all things; and better than thou lovest Misaphris, else wouldst thou never have sold that sullen Chebron a kiss, even for his emerald head-band. Nought should buy him a kiss from *my* lips ! Why, he is unlucky !—he hath the Typhonian mark—the red-haired, sullen scribe ! And Isenofra could kiss those thick lips with their loose skin and hideous sneer ! Well, what will not gold and gems gain from a maiden’s heart !”

And the dear, sweet Berenice sighed moralizingly.

“In good faith,” said the elder girl, sarcastically, “thou hast become wonderfully chary of thy favours, in a strangely short time ! And

what didst thou pay for thy new zone? Bocchoris gave it thee. But he gives not for nought. I warrant, that he had ample payment. Aye, Berenice! as much, or more, than the hasty kiss which the scribe snatched from my unwilling lips! Bocchoris is a noble—Chebron but a scribe. And it sounds better in the ears of the proud Nausicaë, and her insolent train, that the ‘Noble’ gave this and this, than that the ‘scribe’ bestowed his gift! But there is not much distinction to the lover! And Zminis would not that thou shouldst pay the one rather than the other. Bocchoris, to him, will not shine any brighter than Chebron. And the red hair of the scribe, will seem no more unlovely in his sight, than the pale cheek and fierce eye of the noble. Thy payments to the soldier were—what, Berenice?”

“Ample,” returned Berenice: “The acceptance of his gift.”

“To whom did Isenofra make that speech last?” laughed Eirene, clapping her hands. “Fye, Berenice; wilt thou not leave our queenly matron her own pride? When didst thou pilfer this lesson?”

“Yesterday,” said Berenice, “the Stranger Barbarian gave her that foreign dress, and when he asked her for its price—thou knowest

my meaning?—she gave him only these words. Tell me, Isenofra, why wilt thou kiss Chebron, the red haired, sullen man, who, had not the good King Amasis forbidden, would, ere now, have been offered up as a Typhonian Sacrifice—and refuse thy lips to this clean and comely stranger? He is a pleasant man, for all he looks so coldly on our shows, and seems to wonder through his small eyes whether we be women, or demons of the air. What a desolate place must his country be! With no dancing maids, no games, no pleasure—how can they live? But Isenofra, I had rather give him the dancing girl's payment than I would bestow it upon Chebron!"

"How canst thou talk thus, Berenice?" returned Isenofra, angrily; "now thou dost indeed transgress, even the wide bounds of our place! If *thou* wilt do such wickedness, thou art welcome. But insult not *me*. A maiden of Egypt touch, in love, a Barbarian? Pah! my blood curdles at its very mention!"

"Dost thou then love Misaphris?" asked Berenice, raising herself, and passing her hands over her half-shut eyes; "was it love for him, or only the pride of the Daughter of Khem that spoke out in thy last words? Dost thou

love him, Isenofra—thy fair-spoken, slender, soldier-boy?”

“Misaphris hath angered me,” returned the queen, majestically. “I have not yet forgiven him.”

“Let me caress him into penitence,” cried Eirene, running away as she said the words, in pretended fear of her sister’s upraised hand, and hiding her face in the folds of Berenice’s robe, while she knelt by the side of the couch.

“Shame on thee, child!” cried Berenice, with the same accent in rebuke which she would have used in praise.

“What Berenice! art *thou* chiding?” exclaimed Eirene, saucily. “Whose day is this? Surely, it belongs not to an Egyptian god, nor can this hour have place in the Catalogue, else such a strange chance could never have happened!”

“I would that our mother, Senpoëris, would do more than chide thee!” cried Isenofra, petulantly. “If thou and the rod were made better acquainted, Eirene, it would be well for thee!”

“Nay, sweet, thou art not really wrath?”

and the pretty, bright creature, stole up to Isenofra, and kissed her neck—for she could not reach her lips. “I know thy true accent of anger, from the false,” she added, half tearfully; “and thoughtless though I am, I dread to hear my Isenofra use the former tone to me.”

“Thou art forgiven, pretty one. Who could chide thee, little Eirene? Mischievous, though thou art mischievous as yon ape upon the perch, none could really chide thee! Thou art such a child!—a baby with a woman’s growth, and still its own baby ways. It would be cruel to treat thee as a woman in all things!”

And Isenofra kissed her young brow.

“Aye! but Eirene, thou art, indeed, very, very mischievous,” sighed Berenice, patiently. “See my poor hair. Oh! how shall I ever braid it smooth again! Thou hast done me a world of ill, Eirene—thou hast indeed!”

“Let it be,” laughed Eirene, putting her arms round her sister’s swelling waist, and looking archly into her sleepy, almond-shaped eyes. “Thou lookest much lovelier thus. And when Zminis comes, he and I together, will bind it for thee. Thou shalt be all fitly

attired when the Barbarian and the scribe arrive. But this soft negligence will please thy lover ! Wilt thou have Zminis for thy tire-woman ? When thou art his own, I wager many a golden ring, that he will deck thy head more oft than thy hand-maidens, were they many as the stars in the sky ! And wouldst thou not love to see his soldier fingers mistaking the proper bands, and in their manly hugeness, making all rumpled and disturbed, that which should lie so smoth and straight ?”

A smile stole over the face of Berenice, as she moved her lips, and answered,

“ Ah ! that indeed, will be a blessed time !”

Then she sank back amongst her pillows as if overpowered with the deliciousness which her young heart promised her in the future.

“ Wilt thou sing, sweet Berenice ?” asked Isenofra.

“ I am hoarse of voice, to-night.”

“ Wilt thou play then for Eirene and me on thy lute ; and we will sing the new Song of the Water-plants ?”

“ Play ? O Thoth, nay !”

“ Oh ! thou wilt dance, instead ?”

“Nay—I am weary.”

“In the name of thy mother, what wilt thou do?” cried Isenofra, losing patience: a thing soon lost with her.

“Sleep. Dear Isenofra, leave me in peace. I only ask thee to leave me alone for a few short moments.”

“Nay, nay! Zminis—Bocchoris—Misaphris—Chebron—the Barbarian—all are coming to-night! Rouse thyself, dear child, for we must prepare for them!”

“I am prepared, Isenofra.”

“Dost thou know the new dance, and the new game?”

“Of course I do! What an idle question!”

“And the water-plants’ song?”

“Yes! yes!”

“Art thou perfect in that which thou hast practised so long in vain?”

“I think I am.”

“Think? Thou wilt ruin our trade, Berenice, if thou dost not take heed!”

“Shall I so?” quietly said the Incorrigible, closing her eyes. “Then wait until I do, before thou dost chide and worry me thus!”

The door opened as she pronounced these words, and a tall and handsome man, dressed in the garb of a soldier, entered the room. With a cry of joy and a swiftness hardly to be expected from one so indolent, Berenice darted from her seat, and rushing into his arms, which he opened to receive her, imprinted a kiss upon his broad and manly chest.

“Why, sweet! thou wouldst almost persuade me that thou wert pleased with my coming,” said the soldier fondly, smoothing back her dishevelled hair, and looking into her face, with a flush of delight mantling over his sunburnt cheek.

“Almost? Ah thou false Infidel! Canst thou name my joy...my ecstasy...cold pleasure?—and to this add that fearful word, almost? Canst thou doubt the heart of thy own Berenice?” returned the maiden hanging round him, and gazing up into his eyes with all a woman’s gentle, clinging tenderness, and all a child’s unasking devotion. For dancing-girls though these three were...though their very trade had given them a freedom of conversation, and a licence of manners usually unallowed to the virtuous; and though they

had often to grant small favors to the unloved lips, yet in spite of all this, in each breast beat a good and true heart. They even deplored...the sweet, gentle Berenice more than all...that their charms had so often to be lavished for the pleasure and the payment of rude men, when the woman's nature would have kept each little grace sacred for the One.

And now as she clung round the rough but kindly soldier, leaning on his breast as trustingly as a child, not all the brightest temptations earth had to offer could give her one moment of that sweet joy which she felt when thus cradled in his arms.

By the side of Zminis stood another visiter, younger and sligher, also dressed as a soldier. But to his arms no sweet maiden fled...no gentle eyes looked into his, to give back the full glance of love ; but coldly, and with averted head, Isenofra bade him welcome in the formal phrase of their office.

“ Not one word, Isenofra ?” he asked humbly.

“ Art thou deaf not to have heard my voice asking thee to rest, and bidding thee be welcome ?” replied the girl turning away pettishly.

“ Pardon me ! but I thought not that Isenofra could have meant those cold words for me ! I give thee my best thanks, maiden, for thy courtly usage ! ”

“ Now, Misaphris ! ” cried Eirene, who having no lover of her own, was the very life’s torment of her companions. “ How coldly dost thou woo ! I, even I, the little Eirene, whom ye all think to be a very child—a thing with neither wisdom sight nor knowledge, I, the callow bird of the waters, could teach thee better things. ”

“ Shame, Eirene ! How darest thou to give thy tongue such licence ! If thou art not worse than a forward child, thou wilt at least be silent ! ”

“ Isenofra, thou art ungrateful. Am I not endeavouring to bring thy slave before thy footstool ? I labour for thy pleasure, and thou givest me only the wages of reproof. I rather cry shame on thee ! ” and stealing behind Misaphris, Eirene pretended to weep ; wiping her eyes with the sleeves of his flaxen cuirass, while she slyly played with the fringe of his dark green quilted helmet, as it hung mid-way down his back.

“ They do not love as we love, ” said Zminis

laughing, and softly pressing Berenice nearer to him. "See! what a pair of fond lovers! They look at each other no more trustingly than do the fluttering bird and the crafty snake! But they have got the pretty little Eirene to plague their love into life, and we may rest undisturbed."

"May ye so!" exclaimed Eirene, running to them; and covering her face in Berenice's long hair, she peeped out from between its thick bands at the handsome soldier. Then letting it fall from her brow, she crossed her hands upon her breast, and said, looking down demurely. "And is there none to speak a kind word to the little Eirene? Or must she be the only solitary and unheeded one of this merry party?"

"Unheeded? Sweet! thou dost thy charms foul wrong if thou thinkest thyself unheeded by any!" cried Zminis gallantly, putting one arm round her, while with the other he still enclasped Berenice. "Who could see thee, and love thee not? Who could mark thy light grace and bounding step, and dismiss thee from his thoughts? Eh, Berenice?"

“Not thou, Zminis, as it seems!” replied that maiden, half pouting, and endeavouring to get free.

“Nay! thou art not jealous of a child, dear love?”

“Child, Zminis! she is mine own age wanting but from the season of the overflowing to that of the flowers.”

“Aye, Berenice, but thou knowest that some flowers are opened earlier than others;” said Eirene, “and thou knowest, too, that neither Isenofra, nor the Mother Senpoëris, nor thou thyself, traitress!—give to me half of those privileges which ye take by right of age!”

“Then thou hast the double privilege with others: as child and as woman both. Thus, as child, and thus, as woman;” and Zminis imprinted two kisses on the lips that were so red and fresh.

“This is only our soldier way!” he added appeasingly to Berenice.

“A way thou seemest to like too well!” replied Berenice, looking as if she was going to cry. Like a child when its toy has been injured.

“There! I return them to their rightful

owner!" laughed Eirene. "It was but a jest, sweet sister!" she whispered. "Come! clear thy pretty brow, else Ziminis may get wearied. And now," she added aloud, "Ziminis, thou and I must be this sluggard's tire-woman. See! all her long silky hair did these wanton fingers unloose from their purple bands, that thou mightest have the happiness of binding them afresh. Oh! how I shall laugh to see thy broad hand wander among these little threads, unknowing what pain its rough touch gives! And how I shall rejoice to mark the patience of the sleepy sister, as she sits nestling against thy arm, and caring nought for inconvenience, so long as she feels thy brave heart beating against her own!"

What made the eyes of the young maiden glister as if with tears, whilst she warmly pronounced these words, although her lips laughed merrily? There was an accent of sadness, too, in her voice. A strange accent for her! Ah! Eirene, child as she was, yet knew the meaning of the maid's first, unspoken yearning to be loved! "Come, come! to our dear task, my gallant soldier!" she cried, with her own shrill laugh, as the slight shade of undefined melan-

choly passed off her soul, like the baby's breath from the mirror.

And Berenice smiled, and clung closer to her lover, while he placed her in a large double chair. Eirene drew a high stool near her, and both together commenced the task of smoothing and binding the wayward tresses.

"And wilt thou not speak as of old, Isenofra?"

"I will not Misaphris. The past is not the present. And the affections of the one are not those of the other."

"Cruel girl? wilt thou be for ever wrath with me?"

"I am not wrath. I am merely indifferent to thee."

"And thou wilt not tell me the meaning of this sad and sudden change? that is hardly fair, Isenofra!"

"Thy conscience must tell its meaning. Why need I repeat its words? If thou canst not understand these, neither wilt thou understand mine."

"No, by my faith! I know not why thou dost look so cold and stern! By the honor of a soldier I am innocent of all offence. Tell

me dearest ! and if I have committed wrong, I will pray thee for pardon in such moving terms that thou shalt not be able to withhold it ! And I will give thee humble words of repentance ; and grieve, even for an unintentional misdeed, as I would grieve for the foulest crime. Ah ! what crime can be so black, as offence to the one we love ! I must be guilty, else hadst thou not frowned. But let my penitence atone for all. Sweetest Isenofra hear me !”

Isenofra, whose weighty reason for anger was a fit of jealousy, caused by Chebron the scribe, who had maliciously informed her, that her young lover had given some gay trinket to the chief of another band of dancing-girls, between whom and herself existed the deadly feud of rivalry,—ashamed to mention a complaint so derogatory to her pride, wrapped it up in mysterious hints and inuendoes, according to the custom of all jealous mistresses,—and finally ended, by being firmly persuaded that she was the most ill-used of earth’s creatures, and proudly bidding the bewildered youth, “think of her no more.” It was in vain that Misaphris petitioned for an explanation ;—in vain that he sued for pardon :—in

vain that he vowed by every oath lawful for the Egyptian to use, that he loved her and her alone. Isenofra remained inexorable. And the more he would soothe, the less could he succeed.

And at this juncture, — when the rebel tresses were confined within their appointed bounds, — and when Misaphris, half distracted, was endeavouring to quench the fire of Isenofra's displeasure, a man of stranger manners and foreign appearance walked leisurely forward.

This new visiter was dressed in a long, loose robe of a thick and shining material, soft to the touch, and glittering in one mass of gold, and bright colours. And so richly was the garment embroidered. that it was stiff and heavy with magnificence, and rustled audibly as he moved. His hands, which were wonderfully white and small, were, for the present, completely hidden in the hanging sleeves with which he covered them; and nothing but the end of a rounded shoe of embroidered cloth, with the under part thick and clumsy, was visible from beneath the many folds of his long, black, upper cloak. Round his neck was a chain of large beads reaching below his girdle; and another smaller string, fastened

to this, fell down his back. He wore a round cap of peculiar fashion, adorned with a feather of the glorious Bird of Eyes, and surmounted by a red button of a strange shape ; and long straight hair, more grey than black, fell on his shoulders ; embroidered on the breast and back of his vest, were curious figures of beasts and flowers and winding scrolls ; but these were only barely visible from beneath the upper robe. Two small rounded sticks of ivory hung from his girdle, together with a capacious and embroidered bag which served as his pocket.

Such was the appearance of the man who now came forward, with a stoical look in his small black eyes, and a placid expression of unruffled calmness on his flat and pale yellow face. But to those who watched narrowly there was a look of intelligence in those small, slit-shaped eyes, which belied the indifference of his face : a look of acuteness and intellect, though also of timidity and stolidness ;—of great kindness and of suspicion ;—of servility, and of obstinacy. His manners were grave and formal, but without nobleness ; his inclinations frequent and profound, but ungraceful ; and though his looks were conciliating, they

were likewise supercilious. He advanced to Isenofra, and bowed low and often, joining his hands, and moving them before his face repeatedly and rapidly; then turning to the other maidens he repeated the same ceremony, using fewer inclinations to Berenice than he had done to Isenofra, and fewer to Eirene than to Berenice. Judging by their appearance and manners, as to their respective ages, and honouring each according to her seniority. This done, he bent humbly to the two soldiers, who returned his obeisance with true Egyptian pride and gravity; each involuntarily raising himself to his full height, as with one hand he slightly touched his knee. The stranger then slowly withdrew to the upper end of the chamber.

“Wilt thou see our dances, noble sir?” said Isenofra, while she inclined her graceful body.

The stranger moved his head in sign of acquiescence; smiling placidly.

“This then, first!” said the maid, offering him a small stand on which were high, plain goblets filled with Marcotic wine, and a few with the choicer produce of the sweet vines of Tenia. Baskets piled up with grapes, figs,

dates, pomegranates, and round, stony fruits of a rich red colour, and luscious taste—the Lotos fruit—mixed with platters of sweet cakes made of honey, or preserved dates, or seeds, or spices, and bunches of freshly gathered flowers, were placed upon the delicate painted tray, which Isenofra so gracefully offered. “Thou wilt eat and drink?” she added, smiling sweetly, and looking up with a bright alluring glance; one of the arts of her calling.

The stranger rose, and taking one of the goblets with both his hands, raised it a little above his head, saying in foreign accents:—

“Peace and Joy to ye, maids of the Blue River! Health, to ye, Birds of Delight!”

Isenofra, after having removed the goblet which the stranger had used, then presented the stand with its contents, first to Zminis as being the older, and higher in military rank—and next to Misaphris, though the manner in which she offered it to the last, effectually destroyed the value of her courtesy. After they had both taken but a very small portion of the Mareotic wine, turning to her sisters, she motioned them to prepare for the dance; and on clapping her rosy hands, there entered by a side door, three other maidens, of

slightly meaner dress and appearance. Neither were they as beautiful as the dancing girls; though rich in all the Egyptian charms of languid eyes, voluptuous lips, and graceful forms. Though adorned with the additional beauties which the jetty kohl, and the crimson henna could give; yet still they fell infinitely short of that standard of loveliness by which their sweet mistress-sisters were measured. One of these minstrels took a small stringed instrument, which she slung round her by means of a narrow band; another appropriated the double pipes of carved box wood; and the third clashed the wooden cymbals with a clear, merry noise that woke the echoes of the air as with a peal of laughter. Each instrument was wreathed with leaves of ivy interspersed with flowers; and sprays of the same dropped among the maidens' long plaits, while on the forehead of each bloomed the ever-present lotus. They then arranged themselves in the proper places which were assigned to them; and striking a few preliminary chords, they beckoned to the Three that they were prepared. And now was commenced one of those dances so renowned throughout all the known world.

The time and measure at first were slow and solemn; and the music expressed a tender melancholy. In the prolonged notes might be heard the voice of entreaty and complaint; the prayers of a lonely spirit seeking vainly for its mate. The soft breathings of the pipes, like the sighs of a desolate heart, were answered back with the faint murmurings of the lute.

The cymbals gently clanked; but so gently, that their clash seemed but an echo of the lute's sweet tones. All the gaiety, all the noisy, wild, unchecked merriment of their first salutation had died away.

It sounded as the voice of some spirit that has fallen from the skies, and not unmindful of the bliss and harmony of paradise, was mourning to itself in the tones of the speech used there.

The step of the two maidens—the proud Isenofra, and the loving Berenice—was slow and heavy. Their downcast eyes and folded arms spoke of sorrow; and their solitary movements—each alone in her place, told of the weary desolation—the painful loneliness—of a companionless heart; the pining of a fond, yet unloved spirit. And vainly did they

raise their languid eyes—and vainly did they stretch forth their glancing arms: the looks rested on blankness and darkness, and the yearning arms enclasped the empty air alone. And now they meet. They start—the music stops—the dance is still. Earnestly they gaze into each others' eyes, and eagerly they rush to the proffered embrace. And the tones of harmony are clear and sweet.

But now a shade crosses each young brow, and suspicion spreads its dusky wings over each fond heart; and coldly, with averted looks and listless touch, they slowly go on their way. And now they part; one flung haughtily away while folding her hands for mercy. Their bared arms wave high above their heads: this beckoning with earnest pleadings—that repulsing with scorn. Then comes the third—bounding like a thing scarce of earth, and kneeling between the two, she takes caressingly a hand of each, and strives to join them, while her merry eyes speak only of beauty and of mirth, and her sweet lips dimple into baby smiles. Again one white-armed maiden haughtily repels; and again the gentler lovingness of the other forgives and

sues : until at last, dispirited, weary, heart-sore, she veils her face in her slender hands, and mournfully retreats. The spirit now is more than lonely, it has wakened to disappointment and despair. What shriek was that which tore the lute's silver strings? what sobs were those which broke from the Soul of Melody? what sighs did the pipe breathe forth? what cries did the cymbals utter? And oh! what tears are those which fall like gems upon the maiden's raven tresses?

Ha! the music wakens louder strains; bolder—more inspiring! But oh! how cold, how heartless is it all! The eyes of the proud Isenofra flash, and her dark cheeks burn, as carelessly she looks upon her drooping companion. But once more through that cold melody breaks the soft voice, the gentle entreaty. Berenice, patient, winning, pleading, meets the haughty maiden; with her soft arms held forth, and her mild eyes upturned in fond adoration, she meets her, and beseeches, where she ought but to grant a pardon. She gains her sister, and kneels. Who could withstand such an enduring love—such unselfish devotion—such forgiving sweetness? Oh! power-

ful above all, is the power of woman's deathless love! Mighty beyond the might of the sceptre and the sword, is the influence of her patient forbearance! Beauty—grace—riches—rank—all may have their place, but what are they all to that sweet endurance which forgets self!

Isenofra bends over the kneeling Berenice; from her flashing eyes beam now the moonlight tenderness of love. Gently she raises her—and holds her to her heart. Their arms are interlaced; and cheek to cheek, their long hair mingling, they float around the room, the reconciled and blest. Bright, and loud, and clear, was the music: with the tinkling of the cymbals sounding through all the grander strains, as the feet of the fairy Eirene, who circled the two, like some young spirit just let loose from the Halls of Beauty. A basket of fresh flowers in her hand, she shook showers of dewy buds over the sweet dancers; and rapidly untwining a long chain, made of starry lilies, and the rich rosebuds of Persia, she bound her sisters in its perfumed links. Then flinging over both a large transparent veil, she clapped her tiny hands in time

to the instruments, while wreathing herself in and amongst the folds of the floating veil.

Again the music changes. From the exulting notes of triumph, to the calmness of perfected happiness. The wild sobs of young Passion awakened for the first time, and felt in such excess that joy became pain, now subsided into the quiet tenderness of a love known and returned. And the Maidens' dance grew softer, slower still. And the blush faded from Isenofra's brow, and the sweet eyes of Berenice dared now look up with a glance of fuller confidence; and smoother were the gestic and motions of the attending sprite—the young Eirene. And the peaceful love of a happy home was the feeling told of by the melody and the dance.

Upon the cheek of Zminis lay a tear: round his lip a smile; when Berenice, the dance ended, came and laid her head upon his hands, asking for her meed of praise.

“Beautiful! thou doest all things well!” he said ardently. “But this—best of all! For did not thy heart speak out in thine actions? And was not the history of thine own dear affections the secret thought of thy

soul? Thou couldst not have painted passion thus, hadst thou not felt it! And thy sweet eyes could never have looked so fond and loving, hadst thou acted thy part from knowledge only, and not from feeling! Tell me! didst thou think of me in thy dance? Did the form of thy sister Isenofra wear the semblance of Zminis, the Archer of the Chariots?"

"Thou hast hardly need to ask!" replied Berenice, shaking her head. "Unbeliever that thou art—how oft dost thou require my assurance that I love thee, and thee alone; and that all things, as if touched by some enchanter's rod, speak to me of thee? In each flower—each stem—each leaf—in every sound of the winds, or the rippling wave—do I behold some line that reminds me of thee—do I hear some tone that echoes back thy voice. How oft must I tell thee this, incredulous Zminis?"

"Every day—every hour—every moment! And when not in word, then in look, in gesture, in soft caress, in gentle kiss! Who that loves could rest content with *past* assurances, though a thousand times repeated? The Past is not *now*; and its affections may have died with its hours. Again! again!—the tale of

love is never old; nor its touch too oft bestowed! Its soothings never weary, its kisses never pall. Again! again! Berenice! Tell me again that thou dost love me!"

"For ever will I repeat it!" replied the young girl warmly. "Dearest and bravest! To thee alone my love doth turn; to thee alone my heart is given! Not the fairest Lord in Egypt should buy, even with his father's halls, one of these caresses which I lavish on thee so freely!" and taking his rough and swarthy hands, she folded them in her bosom, first putting them to her lips with shy yet ardent fondness.

The stranger smiled. A faint and sickly smile, that had as much of contempt as of sympathy in it. But excepting for this equivocal smile, and the twinkling of his black eyes, not a shade of feeling came across that flat pale face, to relieve its insipidity.

"I think that thy step grows lighter each new day I see it!" cried Misaphris, to his offended mistress. "Thou dost float in the air like a feather from the wing of the purple pigeon, upborne by the wind of the Resplendent Season. Eirene's step is too small and childlike; Berenice wants thy elastic bound.

Neither of thy sisters unite thy majesty and lightness,—thy dignity and softness. How didst thou get thy grace, beautiful Isenofra?"

"I wonder that thou canst find words to praise my poor dance," returned Isenofra, "when Nausicaë, the chief of the Band of Twenty, hath such witchery for thee!"

"Nausicaë!"

"Dost thou not know the name?"

"Truly, I know her name; and I know her band; and I have witnessed their dances and games of skill. But why hast thou spoken of her to me! Ah! traitress to thine own secrets! I have then found the cause of thy frowns? Thou wouldst never have pronounced the name with such an accent of contempt, had not the woman's wrath been raised! And so poor Nausicaë hath been the mother of these dark frowns?"

"And surely I have reason to frown!" said Isenofra reluctantly; but still pouting.

"Nay! nay!—no more than thou hast reason to chide, because I breathe the same air that floats around her dwelling! Nausicaë cause thee jealousy? My sweet! for once thy woman's penetration hath erred, and hath con-

jured up shapes and phantoms, which never owned bodies to give them reality !”

“Is Misaphris denying that he hath of late looked much after Nausicaë, the Star of the Street of Flowers?” said a sneering voice ; and Chebron, the Scribe, laid his hand on the young soldier’s arm. “Canst thou deny that thou didst give to the bright Queen of the Twenty a carcanet of stones, so curiously stained that they mocked the truer emeralds of the mine ? Where didst thou lay thy modesty to sleep ?—And for mercy’s sake, tell us, where thou didst dig thy truth’s dark grave ! It were well worth the trouble to awake the one and unbury the other !”

“I know that thou art sharp of wit, Chebron,” replied Misaphris hastily ; “and that thou thinkest to do by force of many words that which thou canst not do by force of true ones. I bought this carcanet for Nausicaë at her own request ; Semmuthis, the jeweller, was sick, and she had not leisure to go to him. And the Twenty have not danced to my pleasure since the last Season of the Waterplants. And then I knew not Isenofra !”

“I know nought of all thine excuses.” returned Chebron carelessly. “Nausicaë herself told me the tale, as I repeated it here. And moreover she gave to me that gift which she said that thou hadst left upon her lips. It was wonderfully sweet, Misaphris! but it had been sweeter hadst thou not eaten that foul garlic which tainted even the perfume of the bright maiden’s lips. Thou shouldst never eat that rank root, boy; when thou goest to caress the daughters of the Land! Its savour tells sad tales,—and tales which thou, for one, wouldst rather have had hidden!”

“It is useless to answer thee!” said Misaphris, inwardly chafing; but afraid to show contempt or anger for one of the Sacred Order, he sauntered up to where Eirene sat on a low seat, weaving chains and necklaces from a lap-full of glittering lotus-buds. And diligently he broke blossom after blossom in his fruitless endeavours to bend them with his trembling hands as they should lie. At last Eirene shaking her pretty head whispered: “Dear, good Misaphris, I love thee well; but not well enough to let thee sit here, and slaughter all my sweet buds which I have watched as they slowly broke from their green prisons. I can-

not let thee, Misaphris !—so keep thy cold hands to thyself; or else,” she added, bending her head close to his ear, “go, use them, with the aid of thy long stick, to teach yon ugly scribe courtesy and truth ! The Gods forgive me for my sin !—but that red-haired man seems more fit to be the emblem of Typho than the minister of the priests of Amun !”

Chebron threw himself, almost at full length, on one of the couches that were scattered about, and flinging down a heavy bag of gold, commanded the maidens to dance to him. At the sound of the clinking rings, an old woman, thin, bent, and withered, who until now had sat unobserved in the further corner of the room, employed in weaving large fowling nets of flax, darted up to the group. Making an ungracious salutation she caught up the purse, and thrust it into the bosom of her dress—her skinny hands trembling with their eagerness. She was again retreating, like a wolf to its lair, when the Stranger arrested her, by asking in his foreign accent, and with one of his foreign obeisances, “ If money was usually given? ”

“ And if it were not, how should I and

these puppets find bread?" said the old woman tartly.

The stranger bowed repeatedly, with the same placid expression, and the same lurking smile; and after feeling for some time in the richly worked pocket by his side, he drew forth a small bar of gold, stamped with unknown characters. And laying it in the woman's horny palm, he bestowed on it and her many good wishes.

The woman kept the gold in her hand, looking at it with disappointment; then flung it on the ground, saying; "Dost thou insult me thus?"

"What means the venerable mother?" asked the stranger, appealing to Isenofra.

"She says that she must have money," answered the girl blushing.

"But I have given her money!" returned the stranger, in an expostulating tone.

"Not in the coin of the Pure Land," said Isenofra; "and the gold of the Foreign Nations is not as ours, neither will it buy us bread from our storehouses."

"And how know I that it is even true gold, and not a false metal?" said the woman, in a shrill voice, "ye Barbarians have strange ways

with ye! And few are fit to trade with the sons of the Valley of the Nile. I question if Semmuthis the jeweller would give me half its weight in our coin! It feels light, and its colour is not good!" she continued, scrutinizing the golden bar, and weighing it in her hand.

"Barbarian!—that word to me," replied the stranger, with arched eyebrows, and falling back a step or two.

"And wherefore not?" said Isenofra, with a proud movement. "Thus do we name the children of every nation without the boundaries of the Land of the Tree. It is not a word used to thee alone. Thou knowest that we, the children of Khemi, are the sole of men beloved by the Gods, or gifted by the Thrice Great Thoth!"

"Strange!" repeated the Foreigner, musingly. "And so with us! Thus do we likewise name all the nations that dwell beyond the Celestial Country—all the dark regions upon which the Great Fo has never deigned to look."

"Thou wouldst not include the Pure Land in the darkness?" asked Eirene, coaxingly, and taking hold of the large string of beads.

"At the least not its maidens!" replied the

Stranger with an admiring look. "Although ye so fail in one of the dearest graces of our women!" And he stooped down to place his hand on Eirene's small and sandalled foot. "The Golden Waterlilies of our maidens are not the size of this, if half were wanting!"

"Truly so! and yet men say that my foot could dare the whole plain of the earth to shew its superior!" replied Eirene, laughing.

"See my daughter's sandal!" returned the Foreigner, again diving into the depths of his ample pocket, and producing a shoe fit only for the foot of an Egyptian child just escaped from its leading-strings.

A murmur of admiration and surprise broke from the girls who all gathered round to see and touch the curiously minute sandal; while the men exchanged looks that were as eloquent as words. Such looks as men cast amongst each other, when the beauties of women are the theme of conversation.

"This is the size of our maidens' glancing feet," said the stranger with a boastful accent.

"But how many summers hath thy daughter

seen?" asked Zminis, anxious to uphold the honor of his country women.

"As many as hath that graceful plant," replied the Stranger pointing to Isenofra. "The young bird hath now a nest of its own. She is wife and mother both."

"And have all thy women these same beautiful limbs?" enquired Eirene.

"Not all, my pretty one!" he answered, "but we would deem it unsightly in a noble lady, could she boldly move through life with the independence of a man! Our women lean upon us, their protectors, and are not of that race which makes it hard to say whether they be male or female! With such baby's feet as these, they can scarce walk alone; and oh! ye men, what greater joy is there, than that of succouring — helping — assisting — a gentle creature that looks up to ye for more than a mother's support? Aye, indeed! the brightest grace of the daughters of the Flowery Land is centered in, and springs from the Golden Waterlilies! See!" he added proudly, laying the shoe beside Eirene's foot. And small and perfect in shape as was the Egyptian maiden's limb, it now looked large when contrasted with the fairy size of this foreign

woman's shoe, which left such room for the imagination to picture a very model of perfectness and beauty.

"And your women are fair?" again questioned Zminis.

"Yes, soldier! fair as the white rose; and virtuous as fair," answered the Stranger with emphasis.

"Like most of their sex," returned the other carelessly. "A little virtue and a great deal of weakness. Beauty, youth, and coldness, never yet met together in one woman of all that I have seen. And a soldier's life, noble sir, is none of the idlest! I have seen much, and visited many foreign parts; and I noted nought so well as the women of each land where I sojourned."

"And were I to have named thy peculiar study, I had mentioned this," said the Stranger significantly. "But our maidens," he added rising, "would as little dream of writhing their slender bodies into all these dancing-girls, unseemly attitudes—and as little would they teach their modest eyes and pure lips the bold language of these, as they would bury their sweet lives beneath the waves of the

Yellow River. With them," he continued, turning to the Three and speaking with severity. "Kiss and love is granted only when the marriage-blessing allows of such. Until then, the highest mountain wears no colder brow: the steepest rock is not more inaccessible. The faintest touch they deem dishonor; the smallest exposure of Nature's feelings shame; what then, unblushing caress, and public love? Think on my words! Ye are young, and fair as the moon's path through the silver-pinioned clouds—bright as the painted arch of the sky—and something in ye speaks of good. Turn not all these graces into deepened vice, by failing in the best gift of your sex—Modesty!"

And deliberately folding his hands in his large sleeves, the cold, stern Stranger, scarcely deigning to take farewell, walked slowly from the room. Halting near the door, he placed a purse of the Egyptian Circular Bars upon the lotus-stand that stood near, making a slight movement to Senpoëris, the Guardian, as she clutched the bag with her palsied hands.

"My maidens in tears!" cried a young Noble, who hastily brushing past the Stranger, sprang into the chamber. "What hath hap-

pened? Zminis—Chebron—young boy—what hath made these bright drops to flow?”

“The foreign man’s moralities!” Chebron replied with a coarse laugh. “Women love not the teachers of their own sex; what then when *we* not only cast off their bands of excitement—of itself a grievous sin!—but even lecture them on their weaving!”

“But who hath dared to do this?” again asked the Noble, who was a dissipated and dark-looking man, with a wild expression of mingled care and recklessness in his face, and a look of sorrow drowned in vice.

“The Stranger!” replied Chebron.

“What Stranger, scribe?” returned the other impatiently. “Has the City of a Hundred Gates so few children of a foreign soil within her walls, that all must know when one appears?”

“I cannot tell thee aught more of him, however impatient thou mayst be,” answered Chebron. “He has come from some far off land beyond the dark mountains—some land where the fresh Etesian wind never blew—where the Mighty River never rolled its sacred waves. Hast thou not oft seen some flat, strange-looking vessels, with staring eyes and

red prows, lying moored among our painted sails in the ports of Berenice and Myoshormos by the ocean shore? He came in such a vessel as this. And disembarking at Myoshormos, arrived at the Glorious City by the Great Road. He has brought with him a cargo of that delicate pottery which is so highly prized. I saw him this morning standing at the corner of the Street of Flowers, bargaining with the Merchants for their bales of fine linen, and with some fair-haired Barbarians from the Western Isles for their tin, in exchange for these porcelain cups and vases. Dost thou believe, Bocchoris, in the coming of evil demons among men?" said the malicious scribe hastily, turning towards the Noble, and fixing his blearing eyes with a sharp, hound-like glance upon his face.

"What words are these, Scribe!" cried Bocchoris, looking over his right shoulder to avert the evil omen. "I shudder at thy talk! My very blood is cold!"

"And thou a soldier?"

"Aye! but only a man withal. And what can a man do against the power of such beings?"

“ True ! he can do nought. He can but suffer their torments.”

“ My whole flesh is stone cold !” said the Noble shuddering. “ I would that I had not met this cursed Stranger on the threshold. I thought that his dull eye looked evil ! What, if he have smitten me !”

“ Then shall I have to use the sharp stone of incision in thy service ; and these fair maidens, in gratitude for all the gay gifts with which thou hast adorned them, and in soft sweet memories of all the dear caresses which their rosy lips have paid thee, perchance will fling mud and dust over them ; and bare their right arms, while wailing out lamentations for the noble dead. Thou shalt have a new, beautiful Osiris-bed !” said Chebron, laughing hoarsely, as he thus alluded to the ceremonies of embalmment, and to the funeral rites.

And Bocchoris, the powerful noble, shook as that mean man’s laugh resounded through the chamber. This was but a trifling instance of the powerful influence which the more educated of the Egyptians, namely the ministers of the Temple, possessed over the minds of the nation. The slightest allusion to the

fearful Being of Evil, or to his Spirits, as connected with himself, seemed to curdle the life-blood of him thus addressed. The smallest unpropitious omen that met him on his way was a matter more worthy of lamentation to the Son of Khem, than the death of his darling child, or the saddest reverse of fortune. It was the mystery which was enwrapped in this terror, and in these omens of bad fortune, that made them so much more dreadful than the actual presence of any misfortune. With the Egyptians, as with all men of every class and every nation, the Unknown—the Hidden—was of far more value and account than the sternest and plainest lesson practically taught. For what is the Real when balanced with the Mysterious ?

“ I am accounted the most expert cutter for the embalmer in all the streets of the Hundred Gates,” Chebron continued, glancing furtively at the agonized face of Bocchoris. “ And I escape swifter, than can any, from the stones and darts which my sapient countrymen send forth against me, as the reward of my skill and humanity. Even should thy spirit but have fainted, and not have died within thee, Bocchoris, when I cut thy cold flesh, I have

not destroyed its resurrection! Not many of the Incissors could boast so much. Once under their sharp stone, all chances of return to earth, as men, are lost for this cycle. Their luckless victims must wait patiently until the Grand Era revolves, before their poor bodies can become reanimate. But thou needst not dread aught of this, Bocchoris! It was a fatal chance that led thee hither, at that very moment when the Evil-eyed Stranger was passing forth! And thou didst touch his garment too? Ah! thy cup is filled, poor Lord! Amun! how pale thou growest! Here, Berenice!—Isenofra!—girls!—a cup of wine! He hath fainted. Lo! how pale he lies!” And the scribe smiled as he bent over the fallen man, and roughly wiped the froth from his clammy lips. Feeling his wrist, he bade the frightened maidens fear nothing, “that it was but a passing cloud!”

“Why man!—art thou such a poor, faint heart?” was his first salutation, as the noble breathed a heavy sigh, and opened his eyes, with a dull, glazed look.

“Nay, not that,” he answered faintly, “but I have fasted long, and am weary. Give me wine!”

With trembling hands he took the goblet from the kneeling Berenice, and drained it to the last drop.

"That is well! cried Zminis kindly. "Thou wouldst not shame thy brave profession, Lord! See, now, thy cheek grows more life-like, and thy lips assume a healthier hue! The brave soldier-heart could not fail!"

"It is over now," replied Bocchoris, rising.

"And thou art well?" asked the maidens, who had gathered together with pale cheeks and terrified looks.

"Well, sweet birds? Aye, as well as Love and wine can make the man's soul!" cried Bocchoris in a wild voice, and waving the cup round his head.

"Hem! thou hast fasted long and art weary?" said the Scribe in a low, significant tone. "And now that I look on thee, thy garments are torn, and soiled, and travel-stained. From whence hast thou come, Lord? What can have been thy weighty business? It seems to me, that the whole of the Two Worlds is in disorder! It is like a troop of bees just swarming from their honey-cells. And thou art taking part in this tumult?"

Beware ! The Evil Eye looked not for nothing !”

“ Wouldst thou know all the matter ?” returned the noble, whose brow was fast flushing with the effects of his deep draughts. “ Nay, nay, Scribe ! I trust not my secrets to the keeping of any breast but mine own !”

“ Hist !” whispered Chebron, coming closer to him, and putting his mouth to the noble’s ear. “ Shall I then tell thee ? Thou art for the Assyrian ! Foolish noble ! Unwise Bocchoris ! Dost thou not know the penalty of traitor communication with an enemy ? Art thou anxious to rid thee of that mischievous organ which so oft brings men to the knowledge of the executioner---the tongue ?”

The crimson glow paled from the cheek of Bocchoris, and he started from the Scribe with a look of horror and alarm.

“ What dost thou say ?” he then said slowly. “ In the name of our Great Mother, how didst thou come by this knowledge ?”

“ He who stands even upon the lowest threshold of the Temple hath wonderful secrets committed to his charge !” replied Chebron mysteriously. “ I may not tell thee how, or from whence, I buy my wisdom. Suffice it to

know that I possess it, and I possess also the knowledge of thy actions. For the rest, care thou not !”

“ Wilt thou betray me ?” gasped the noble.

“ Nay !” replied Chebron carelessly. “ I should gain nothing by so doing. Thy life is not of sufficient value to repay me for the labour of betrayal. Who would give me the meanest coin to know that Bocchoris, the noble, was a traitor ? Not our holy King ! For thou knowest how little he prizes ye soldiers. The High Priests, though,” he continued, as if calculating the probable chances, “ they would give me much for my vigilance. So ! It seems almost worth the trial ! Yet no ! Ye nobles may all die as rats, and the Land will gain for every pale carcase in the Tombs, a living member for the Priesthood.”

“ Thou art right,” said Bocchoris, gloomily. “ We, the bravest and the best of the Egyptian race, are now the most contemned and despised. Our fathers’ homes are the stranger’s —our lands, another rules : our wealth, the robber spends ; whilst we, formerly the untouched and privileged, can be thrown into the debtor’s dungeon at the instance of every base-

born, because we lack our own—our rightful inheritance! Look on me. Before yon Priest-King mounted the Sacred Throne—I was honored, rich, a man. The patron of all that was beautiful, I was as an inexhaustible mine. At my feet, as the footstool of a king, were poured out treasures, which my gold could buy, and my sanction stamp with additional value. The Regal Halls of Babylon, were not more splendid than were mine. Like a prince I held; like a prince I gave away; and even the babe was taught to lisp the praise of Bocchoris, the Theban Captain! And now, I creep through life, the very beggar's scorn! And I fear to see mine own vile slave, if I owe him for my sandal-thongs! And this, your holy Memphite, your Pontiff-King hath done! Am I to bless the hand that has slain me? But come!--away with these sad thoughts! In the present I will find joy, and I will drain the cup of pleasure to the latest drop! Wine, maidens! wine! Sound the harp! Sing!--dance!--flit before and around me, as very Shapes of Beauty, and subdue these black visions of sadness that oppress me!--What ho!--Mother Senpoëris! Dost thou want gold? See, my last piece! My last piece, maidens, spent to buy me your darling smiles!"

And he laughed boisterously, as he threw the old beldame a small piece of money.

"Our smiles need not always be bought," said Berenice, gently offering back the money to the Noble. "To-night, at least, we will bestow, and not sell."

"And wilt thou not bestow more, sweet?" cried Bocchoris, taking her arm. "One little kiss?"

The girl blushed with a sudden glow, as of anger; then answered gravely,

"The gifts of my poor lips, Lord, I give only with love. Neither for gold nor honor are these granted!"

"And Zminis is the treasurer, ah?" said Chebron, with a coarse look.

"Aye, Scribe!" said the soldier, coming forward. "Hast thou aught to say, were it even so? I am the treasurer and the keeper of this maid's love; and woe to the robber that would steal my riches from me! Not Rhampsinitus himself, would show less mercy than would I!—let this night-thief be whom he would!"

"Softly—softly, good Zminis! None would wish to rob thee," said Chebron, sneeringly. "At least, not I! This is my divinity," he

added, turning to Isenofra; "None will rival me here!"

"That boy's cheek and eye speak defiance, though his lip uses no word," cried Bocchoris, laughing, and pointing to Misaphris.

"Pshaw! who would fear the rivalry of such!" repeated Chebron; "Isenofra loves men not boys—is it not so, sweet?"

"Come, dance!—dance!—my light-limbed angels!" cried the Noble, impatiently. "My soul is weary, and my heart is heavy! Away! Away! Away! Delight and refresh me!"

And once more the beautiful maidens danced their magic dance. And once more the music's sweet strain floated through the air; and filled the whole chamber with harmony.

And thus the night was passed. Joy, and mirth, and wine, filling up each moment. With sometimes a deeper, holier feeling, possessing the souls of Berenice and Zminis, as she found herself near to him, with her caressing arms twined round his stalwart frame, and her gentle head laid against his bosom. And sometimes Isenofra and the young soldier, like two children alternately weeping and laughing in their play, now endearing, now repelling, for-

got that other and colder eyes were watching their thoughtless actions. Eirene sat by herself, or nestled up to the palsied hag, the Mother Senpoëris ; and she even smiled as she stroked her bright head. And resting that sweet baby head upon the trembling knee of the old woman, the young girl looked wistfully at her sisters, and in her heart wished that the gods had sent her, too, such a lover.

Chebron and the Noble lounged together ; scrutinizing the maidens as they passed, and remarking on their beauties ; while urging on the chattering monkey to its mischievous pranks, or making the teased ichneumon's eyes glow with rage. And every now and then, turning closer to each other, they talked in low whispers, gravely and earnestly, of " Sethos," and " Sennacherib ;" and once they named " Amasis," and as they did so, the Scribe laughed meaningly to himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INVESTITURE. THE OFFERING TO APIS.

THE OMEN. YOUTHFUL BOLDNESS SPURNING
AT CHECK.

“AND now, my girl, lay aside thine instrument,” said Nitocris, quietly rising. “The hour hath passed, and my father is expecting me in the Hall of Preparation.”

“Thou art to assist at a ceremony, Lady?”

“Yes.”

“The blessing of the king before war?”

“Not alone; there is yet another.”

“ Aye ? Then what is it which follows ? ”

“ The investiture of the young Chaldean to the post of king’s fan-bearer,” replied Nitocris, bending over her work to hide, from the prying glance of the pretty tire-maid, the tear that started unbidden into her dark eyes.

“ My heart loves that news ! ” cried Taia, warmly. “ The brave young Osorchon—how well he will look ! How will his eye flash, and his cheek burn with pride ! And in truth, it will be a proud moment. The king’s daughter standing there, bare-armed to his honor ; the holy priests blessing and clothing him—the great gods themselves looking on approvingly, and pouring their gifts of life and blessings over his young head ; all the highest in Egypt assisting in the advancement of a stranger—once a Gentile—still a nameless, and almost a friendless ! What prouder hour could the brave boy know ? He—he—alone, has been able to cast down the strong barrier which is set between the honors of Khiem and the stranger ; and sure, never did custom give way before a fairer conqueror than Osorchon, the Ishmaelite ! ”

“I marvel at thy words, Taia, and at thy passionate speech, which is too bold for the modesty of the virgin ! Osorchon is neither the first, neither the best, who has been thus dignified. True, he is young, and his impure Barbarian blood is scarce a claim for the good things of the Land of the Tree ; and had it not been that his promotion comes from a priest and my father—I had wondered much at the infatuation which could have thus warped the better judgment. But it comes from a Sacred Hand—and the gods themselves direct the deeds of their servants. Therefore is it good. And there is nothing so wonderful in the matter, as thy fancy points ! It is but the recurrence of an often-acted ceremony.”

“Granting that there be nought wonderful, dear Lady, yet is there not something brighter than even the sweet birthday of Horus’s eyes ? The youthful sun, springing up from the blue Nile, sheds not more glorious rays upon the earth, than the presence of the Princess Nitocris sheds over the heart of Osorchon, the Chaldean ! Gods ! he would trample under foot fan, banner, flabella—fling away as dross and impurity, the ring of investiture—he would mingle with the very swine-

herds that shiver without the Halls of the Gentile, rather than lose the blessedness of thy gracious presence ! Thou knowest that thou alone art his star !”

“ What words are these ?” cried Nitocris turning sharply round. “ Hast thou become utterly weary of my affection, Taia, that thou art taking such pains to slay it ? Thou couldst not have chosen any better means ! Nay ! thou needest not pout thy lip, as though thou wouldst say, thou art injured ! I am weary of all this folly.”

And she covered her face with her long, loose sleeve.

“ My poor mistress,” thought the girl, as she gently took the hand of Nitocris ; “ thou art more weary of thine own heart, and grieved for the commands of thy pride, than for any word of mine.”

“ And I assist at the ceremony,” added the Princess looking up ; “ as the priestess of Isis bearing her part in the processions of Phtha—as the daughter following her father’s way—not as the Princess Nitocris aiding in the investiture of the bold Ismaelite ! There is a wide difference, girl ! As the one, I would

kneel at the foot of the herdsman, if need were—as the other, I would not honor the bravest warrior of the Two Worlds!”

“Not one, lady?”

“I say it again: not the bravest heart that now beats under the sun of Egypt!”

“Then thou art less woman than Princess? And pride has more power over thee than love?”

“Love?” said Nitocris, almost in a whisper, and drooping her head. “Love?” Then drawing herself up, and crossing her arms tightly over her bosom, she added, “I know it not. The maiden ought not to breathe this word, even to her own soul. My father—my lands—my gods—all these I love, revere, and worship—but for the rest, it is a blank.”

And she shook her tresses from her forehead, and looked proudly and steadily into the tirc-maid’s eyes.

Taia made no reply; but handing to the Princess the thin veil with which the Egyptian women covered themselves on their journeys abroad, they passed into the Sacred Robing-place. There, clothing herself in the rich garments of her office—the blue and white striped robes, the chains, the rings, the arm-

lets, and the gorgeous sandals—and exchanging the asp-fillet and blue lotus-flower for the beautiful cap of the Sacred Vulture—her sweet face paler than usual, and with an unnatural fixedness in her deep eyes, Nitocris hastened to join those about to proceed to the Temple of Phtha-Sokar, where the ceremony was to be performed.

As she appeared, Sethos, motioning her to take her place among the other bright bearers of the sistra, seated himself in his royal litter, and the procession began to move : the priesthood taking the foremost rank.

First came the flute player, a priest of the lower degree, in a dress consisting simply of a loose robe of fine linen, fastened round his waist by a girdle, and secured over the upper part of his body by a broad strap, that passed over his shoulders and crossed his back and breast. Unornamented papyrus sandals, and a close fitting cap completed his costume. He carried a large double pipe of box-wood, with which he made sweet melody for the pious multitude, as slowly, and with dignified steps, they followed in his way. Two priests of the same grade as himself walked at a few paces distance on each side, with the symbols of music, and two

of the sacred books of Hermes Trismegistus in their hands. Of these books, one contained songs of praise to the gods; the other, moral and religious precepts for the king, and rules for his conduct. The melody was impressive and solemn—like a speech half of prayer, half of praise—as it echoed through the sky. It was slow, yet with the wildness of enthusiasm breathing out in every note. It was harmonious, yet with the carelessness of inspiration; soft, yet inspiring; majestic, yet penetrating. And the songs, which the Hieropsalti, or choristers chanted to Phtha, and the potent mother-goddess—the Myriad-named—accorded sweetly with the tinkling of the small cymbals beating in symphony.

Of this band of choristers, the Isiac Priestesses formed a part; with their floating hair, and glancing arms, and wild, young eyes filled with love, and religion so like to love, that the two could not be separated. Foremost walked the Royal Maiden. Her right arm was bared to the shoulders; and in her jewelled, rose-tipped hand, she bore the Sacred Sistrum—a four-barred instrument of bronze, finely worked, and covered with chased ornaments. The.

handle was surmounted by the head of Isis wearing the Mother's Cap of the Sacred Vulture ;—the reverse bore the face of the sister-goddess, Nephthys—the Mysterious End—with a broad crown of asps placed round her dark brow. On the summit reposed the sleek figure of a small cat, with the globe and horus of Athor, the Lady of the Tree. It was the place of Nitocris, and her privilege as Priestess of Isis, to hold this mystic sistrum in those ceremonies and processions which were of sufficient importance to be performed with all the adjuncts of the Egyptian's worship. A place which was regarded by all as giving a peculiar sanctity to those who occupied it. For Isis was held scarcely inferior to Phtha-Sokar at Memphis. And according to the degree of respect in which the deity was placed, so stood the ministers. Woe to the lost heart, who, worshipping one, dared venture within the temenos of the Temple dedicated to another ! The blood-flecked stones of Coptos, where the Tentyrite execrator of the crocodile-god lay a lifeless corpse, too sadly attested to the fervour, if not to the love, of the Egyptian religion !

In that maze of harmony which wandered

over the face of the sky, like some golden-winged bird of the morning, the sweet voice of Nitocris was sweetest; and of all the bright beauty glowing there none was so bright as hers. Graceful as a young antelope of the desert,—as majestic, and as free,—her feet's elastic tread pacing the paved way in time to the slow chords,—she accompanied, rather than mingled with, the band. And many hearts beat high, and many brows flushed with warm passion, as she glanced past. For Nitocris, the most lavishly gifted, and the fairest of all the Daughters of the Land of Khem, was the aim at which many a bold hope pointed. But she, herself, too proud to be observant, moved on her path of life utterly unconscious of the effect which her presence produced.

After the choristers, followed the Astrologer or Diviner, and Hieraphori bearing the hour-glass, and the palm-branch with its twelve buds, emblems of his science—time and its yearly division. The Diviner knew by heart four other Books of Hermes on astrology,—describing the fixed stars and planets,—the eclipses and conjunctions,—and the various periods of the rising and setting of the sun and moon. Next came the Hierogrammatists or Sacred

Scribes ; their heads cinctured with a purple fillet, adorned with two superb ostrich feathers. Their dress was a kelt or apron tied round the waist in front ; and above this, a wide upper garment of the finest and whitest linen, with full sleeves reaching below the knee. On their bosoms hung the Jewel of the Thmei—the Deities of Truth and Justice—a bright blue sapphire stone engraven as a signet. They carried books, and small cases containing materials for writing. It was their duty to understand the sense of the Hieroglyphs ; the nature and productions of the earth—particularly the state of the Pure Land, beloved above all the nations of the world by the Great Gods of Amenti. The courses of the heavenly bodies ;—the risings and settings of Egypt's star of Sothis ;—the intentions of the holy instruments, all of which had a hidden meaning in their purposes, and shapes, and ornaments ;—the appointed places in which to keep them ;—with the knowledge of weights and measures, ---and a general acquaintance with the people of the different quarters where they resided ; as well as the guardianship of all the things which were necessary for, and used in, holy rites, formed the not trifling sum of the wisdom of the Hierogrammatist. Then followed the

Stoliastes, or Keeper and Fashioner of the Sacred Robes, not only of the Priests but also those of the Statues of the Gods, when they were clothed in the garments of joy on stated feasts partial or national;---in the theophames and the mournings, and in the aphanism and euresis of the Dread Unnamed. He bore the Cup of Libation, and the Cubit of Justice. From him was required the knowledge and interpretation of the peculiar marks on the victims; and the general direction of all things which pertained to the Egyptian Religion.

Last of the train came the Hierophant, or chief Pontiff, in the gorgeous robes of sacrifice; his neck and arms glittering with ornaments, and his dress heavy with gold and embroidery. In his breast he carried the Mystic Jar filled with the Water of the Nile, and Hieraphori followed with loaves of bread. He wore the leopard-skin mantle, the exclusive garment of the High Priest and the Monarch. And he had likewise that peculiar badge reserved only for him, and for the Princes of the blood royal—the lock of hair descending on one side, and looped up behind his ear. The Hierophant was an old man of a wonderfully holy and intellectual counte-

nance. There was a purity in it, even brighter than the purity of a woman, heavenly—angelic—in its undimmed clearness. It awed the boldest gazer to meet those mild, sinless eyes, whose very love—whose very pity---abashed more than the sternest rebuke of a more imperfect nature. To the man on whose heart is impressed the image of a greater glory than is here, will every where be found revelations of that glory and antitypes of that image. God—the Amun—the Life—speaks not by one word alone, nor is his presence in one place alone. The tempest, and the song of the lark—the giant rock, immoveable in its mountain bed, and the tender bud, so tender that the butterfly's wing weighs it to the earth---alike are books, where written in different ways, but speaking the same word, stand recorded tidings of the Everlasting. And surely He, there told of, will not condemn his children, when they, too, speak in many and stranger tongues, the one, same, beautiful speech of Worship! The Father who has created life and loveliness in endless varieties---who has given one voice to the grasshopper and another to the eaglet---who has clothed the rose in crimson, and the lily in snow---who has bestowed on the mountain, torrent and rock, and on the valley, verdure

and flowers---who has made the north man and the south, brothers, though so different, He will not demand from all hearts the same form of prayer---He will not deny the Word of Nature, which tells that uniformity is not one of the requirements of the Lord of the Universe. From all things that have life, are demanded worship and love; yet they may be shown in ways varying one from the other. From all men is demanded Religion---the worship of a Higher---the earnest, unceasing endeavours to resemble that Higher, as the IDEA is impressed on the heart; but the way in which each man endeavours will never be deemed sinful, because it differs from the way of his brother man. Truth is not the one small radius of the circle; rather it is the centre, from which all the radii proceed, and into which they all converge.

Such was the creed of Amenophis;---though obliged rather to shadow it forth by parable, and symbol, and mythe, than boldly preach out to his countrymen the great fact of the Universality of Truth. But High Priest as he was, he knew too well what would be the result of undisguised teaching. He knew that he should effect more by gently casting the seeds

of thought into the hearts of his disciples, there to lie and germinate, than by openly shocking the prejudices of his day.

A great multitude of the people followed in the train of this stately concourse ; the deepest reverence expressed in their downcast eyes, and lowly-bowed heads. In spite of the unpopularity of the king, the awe which he exacted as Priest stifled the resentment which the man and the monarch had excited. A profound silence reigned ; broken only at rare intervals by some, more fervid than the rest, breathing out their adoration for the god-like Amenophis, or their man's devotion for the bright Isiac priestesses who were mingled with the minstrels.

At last the train entered the Great Dromos of Lions, which connected the magnificent temples of Phtha and Apis ; and turning to the west, arrived at the propylæum built by Menes—or the first Pylon of the *Ædes* consecrated to the Dwarf Deity. On either side of the towering gateway, with its brilliant fluttering banners, reposed a colossal sphynx ; guardian and emblem at once of the faith set forth within the holy walls. On the pyramidal pillars and walls of this Pylon, and on the two obelisks which rose up before

them, like the rays of light which they were intended to typify, was sculptured a mass of hieroglyphs. The most frequently recurring character was the Scarabæus under various shapes and combinations. Now with the head of a man—now, horned like a bull; here, holding the sun in its claws—there, winged, supporting the disk on its head, or placed on the summit of the sign of stability, emblemizing more entirely the Great Demi-urgos of the Universe. And different figures of other Gods were praying to it, holding forth their hands supplicatingly, as if to teach men that Light with Life was the Primal One—the Eicton—the Monad—the anti-type above all its own emanations.

The Priests swept through this gateway, and crossed the large pronaos, or entrance court, to the next porch, which was of slightly smaller dimensions than the first. Another court was passed; and they arrived at the steps of the last pylon, which was still less large than the preceding, led into the Sekos or body of the Temple. The people followed thus far, into the first hall; but here they stopped. Beyond, lay the Holy Place, not to be violated by profane tread; and within this

again, the Adytum—the Holy of Holies—to which the High Priest and Sovereign, Pontiff by right of office, might alone penetrate. In this Hall the king's throne was placed; and here he seated himself. Behind his chair of state were ranged all his officers, some of whom bore his flabella and fan and attended to his slightest sign, like dutiful children ministering to a beloved father.

Hardly had the Priests taken up their respective positions—ranking themselves through the wide and lofty hall as mute, and silent, and motionless, as the pillars against which they leant—when foot-steps were heard in the entrance-court, and Osorchon, dressed in a simple tunic of white linen, walked with a modest mien and downcast eyes into the Hall. Crossing his hands over his breast, he made the customary salutation of the inferior; waiting until he was bidden to advance. Two priests then led him forward, and put on him a beautifully embroidered robe of the most delicate texture, hung chains and necklaces round his neck, placed rings on his hands, and bands round his arms, and bound a red fillet about his head. And when thus adorned, they brought

him to the foot of the throne. As the young soldier slowly moved forward, the small cymbals of the choristers, and the sweet-voiced sistra of the beautiful Priestesses, gave out a faint and gentle sound. And the soft melody sounded like the whispering voices of Heaven, lingering in this Gate of Heaven as in their home.

Sethos turned to his officers, as the Priests led up the Ishmaelite, and taking from them the plumed fan, the flabella, and the crook destined for him, placed them in his hands, saying—

“Be thou faithful, and worthy of thine office ! And may the Great Gods bless thee, as I do now !”

Osorchon bent low, his heart lost in a tumult of delight. He, a stranger—a Gentile—and impure in the sight of the Egyptian by reason of his tented birth and foreign nurture—invested with the first order of the land—an order hitherto exclusively reserved for the princes of royal blood, or, failing these, the chief of the nobility—the Priests around him, by their very presence blessing and aiding ; behind him, Nitocris, as Princess honoring, and as Pallacide assisting ; her father, the

Great Monarch, the twice-holy, twice-blessed, the only one of all the Egyptian kings who had thus dared to invade the sanctuary of custom, voluntarily entrusting to him, a youth, so high a dignity—well might his brain grow giddy!--well might he dream fond dreams, which, though baseless and unstable as the sun-kissed mist, were beautiful to look upon, and of glorious shapes! Dream on, boy! In the day of manhood thou must wake, and work. Thou art as yet only in thy first dawn, and twilight is still about thee, and its delusive dimness changes the face of things, making thee see lovely ghosts where gloom, barren rocks, and dancing-fays, where wave but the arms of the blasted tree. Dream on now! Thou wilt wake too soon for thy happiness!

Sethos extended his hand, which Osorchon took in his own; then raising the insignia of his office above his head, he repeated after the attendant priest:

“By the dread Gods—by the Balance and the Tablet—by the scourges of the Forty Two, and the Awful Boat of Return---I swear to serve thee faithfully and truly! May the gentle Horus refuse me the passage of the Dark Lake; may the Fearful Guardian bark me back

to eternal wandering ; may the Four reject, and the tomb be shut against me, if I be not faithful while my life dwells in this body !”

As soon as the young soldier had finished this solemn speech, the priests exclaimed :

“ Thus be it for ever !”

The effect of so many low, subdued voices uttering so fearful a confirmation, was impressive and thrilling in the extreme. Osorchon felt that in spite of himself his cheek blanched, and his lip quivered ; while the hand which held the flabella trembled.

“ Yea ! and thus let it be,” repeated the king, raising his joined hands ; then blessing him, he declared aloud, that the boy was formally invested with the office of his Fan-bearer of the Right hand.

Immediately the flute player and Hieropsalti recommenced their music and songs. And the glorious notes swelled and rose through the lofty building, triumphant as the mountain winds. But one small sistrum poured from its ringed and tinkling bars, to the ear of the newly-elected, the loudest and the noblest strains of all. He turned to thank the sweet minstrel with his glad eyes ; but so pale and

wan her cheek—so fixed the stare of her glazed eye—so listless her whole air—that he sickened as he gazed. Two years before, she had borne the same part in the like ceremony, when her early playmate in his youthful beauty and high birth had knelt to the new and honored king, where now that foreign boy stood before the deserted and reviled ; and the rich voice of Psammetichus had vowed the same vow, which now grated in strange accents through the air. Priestess of the unchanging Isis, she had shaken high her sistrum, and made it give out its glad tones of gratulation—to the herd of listeners, the same as these which now sounded harsh and moaning : but to her, how different !

Osorchon was saddened. All the glory of his late honor faded. And even more ; it hung upon him with a sense of servitude. He longed to steal away ; to hide his eyes from the sun ; to shut out from his ears all sounds of life—to be alone. But his place, from henceforth, was near the monarch's person, and he could not again know the luxury of independence : but sick at heart, or joyous, he must ever school both soul and brow into the one,

same, and unvarying expression of placid quietude. As one weary he turned away, and leaned heavily against a column.

The king then descended from his throne; and slowly walked through the long double row of pillars, which extended from the bronze entrance-doors to the door of the Holy Place. He was accompanied by Amenophis, who followed a few steps behind him. Right royal looked the monarch! His gorgeous robes were rustling with gold and embroidery, and his limbs were one blaze of jewels. The apron which he wore was bound with a glittering row of golden asps, and ornamented in front with lions' heads. On each side fell the ends of a girdle made of several straps richly worked. His striped dress was heavy and dazzling; and his sandals shone with gems and gold. But these he now exchanged for the simple reed-slipper of the priest. Round his head was the royal asp-fillet: and as he walked, the delicate imbricated plates of gold of which it was wrought, moved, so that it seemed living; with its green eyes of emerald-stone glancing in

the light, and its small forked tongue darting incessantly.

He went to the Adytum which contained the representation of Phtha—the statue before which he had so lately dreamt his glorious vision of hope and comfort—and slowly passed into the holy cell with a noiseless tread hushed in veneration. He stood before the statue for some moments; and concealing his face in his robe prayed mutely and earnestly. Then returning, he took from two attendant priests the balls of incense which they held in two open bronze censers, together with the cup of libation, and entering again into the naos—this time accompanied by Amenophis—he placed a costly hawk-headed necklace on the shrine, as an offering to the Lord of the Hawk-prowed Boat; whilst he threw the sweet incense into the flames, and poured over all the precious libatory wine. Holding forth his hands to the statue, after he had anointed it with the fourth finger of his left hand, he besought his tutelar deity to accept this, his offering; to grant him his prayer for success; and to bless his undertaking. After again mutely praying, he left the sanctuary with Amenophis. They had

scarcely closed the door, when a voice issued from the innermost cell—the Holiest Place. Small and faint, was it at first: but it rose in intensity, until it filled the whole Temple with its sound. It seemed to speak to the very soul; to penetrate into the heart; to pierce through the thick covering of the body, and mingle with the life blood—pulsing with each beat, and palpitating with each throb; it covered all as with a heavy garment, and made the twilight air burdensome with its weight. At last it broke into words:

“ My servant, faithful and true—thou shalt not be forsaken! Over the pure and the single-hearted ever hangs the guardian shield of Heaven, and no evil shall penetrate that buckler. Courage! and faint not!” The Voice ceased, then after a short interval of silence it proceeded from the first Adytum, where was the statue, and added: — “ If thou pourest choice wine into coarse vessels, thou dost honor these, and hardest not thy treasure:—but thou makest each to be of good service. Lay the golden thread upon the web of flax, and thou mayst weave a garment for the God himself. But the gold is precious as the incense of Arabah—while the flax is worthless as the

stone of the desert. Unite the riches of purpose, and the poverty of means, and thou dost make the whole of value."

"Thou hearest, O King!" said Amenophis in a clear, harmonious tone, as the voice from the Adytum ceased suddenly and abruptly. "Thou hearest the Promise of the God, and the Response of the Oracle. As their servant and interpreter do I, then, call thee Blessed; and in their name, give unto thee the Falchion of Victory. Take this weapon, and smite with it the heads of the impure Gentiles. Smite and prevail!"

Holy Amenophis! thy loving heart belied the formal phrase of this office, and once more made the shrine of man's thought lower than his virtue!

And now the last act had to be performed; after which each man who could work, must up and bestir himself manfully for the defence of his hapless birth-land. The Investiture of Osorchon, and the Blessing of the King before War were at an end; and the Offering to Apis, the deity incarnate in the Holy Ox, had alone to be performed, before the day's religious business was over.

The priests of the several grades re-arranged themselves in their former order, and with the

addition of the new Fanbearer commenced their progress as before. A murmur of subdued welcome greeted them as they returned to the Porch. Yet this was all the demonstration of joy in which the well-taught Egyptians, in ever so great masses, permitted themselves to indulge. And particularly from those who attended as spectators on the religious processions and festivals, there was more than usual gravity and self-command; as they were of a higher caste than a mere rude populace gathered together to witness some strange show. Sethos acknowledged their courtesies by repeated blessings made by extending two fingers of his hands, keeping their palms close joined together; though in truth, few, very few, of all the half-whispered exclamations of gladness or reverence, were addressed to the unpopular sovereign. None to him as king; and, if any lighted on his head, they were only meant for the Priest.

And now the Temple of Apis rose in sight, towering above the colossal Lions of the Grand Dromos between the Temples of Phtha and of Apis. It stood against the dark blue sky with an air of durability eternal as that; in massive majesty claiming to be alike inhabited;

alike the abode of light, and life, and the Spirit of Truth. Grandest shrine of man-loved blindness! noblest clad of man-born falsehoods! whose glorious robe hid the deformity of the enfolded spectre, and might almost plead for the pardon of those who looked not within, but stood entranced with the beauty of the covering.

The first pylon led into the propylæum—a large open place in the form of a square; and round it was a covered corridor, whose countless porphyry pillars of four sides, tapering towards their lotus, palm-leaf, or Isis-headed capitals—had the colossal figure of a king sculptured on each. With hands meekly folded over the breast they seemed to stand in an attitude of prayer; devotion, the only expression that was marked on the mild and grave countenance. After this court, which was hypæthral, or open to the sky, came a second gateway, opening into another rather smaller enroofed court. Upon the ceiling was painted a mimic heaven of cloudless blue, studded with infinite stars, and bordered by the mystic, encircling Queen of the Universe; who embracing the All in her guarding arms, and bearing the Winged Scarab, spoke elo-

quently in this symbol that Love and Life are the whole of creation. The walls were clothed with bright pictures; partly devotional, partly triumphant; and though left by the artist's pencil centuries before, their colors were fresh and glowing as if laid on but that same day. Exquisitely chiselled statues of marble, and basalt, framed, so to speak, by square pilasters that stood out from the wall at irregular intervals, were ranged in groups round the court. All were of gigantic stature, and wonderful beauty. Through this lay another pronaos, or entrance-vestibule, the pylon of which gradually diminished, as in all the Egyptian Temples; and beyond, was the spacious Hall of Apis.

“ Here, at the entrance, the Priests stopped; and taking off their sandals, each stood, their hearts filled with the deepest reverence, before the massive folding-doors leading into the Holiest Presence. With downcast eyes, soft tread, and humble mien, two of the Guardians of the Sacred Ox now appeared; and in low tones, hushed in awe, said that the Anointed Sovereign of the Two Worlds, and the High Priest, could be led before the eyes of the God.

Sethos, veiling his face, and led by the attendant Priest, went through the barely-opened door; his steps were uncertain and trembling, and his breath came only in thick sobs. Amenophis followed at a short distance; feeling as near, and no nearer, to the Manifestation, than when standing before the opening bud of the lowliest weed. For with him life was divinity, and virtue deification.

In the Hall were a multitude of young and beautiful boys, playing, and singing hymns of praise to the God, in a chaunting kind of rhythm. Some were weaving garlands of blue lotus-flowers for the sacred heifers; and others were dipping fresh grass in the clear fountains which sparkled and splashed up their cool waters in the midst of the court. These were the drinking places of the Holy Bull, for whom the waters of the Nile were too gross from their richness. The boys were the young children, either of priestly parents, or themselves, by peculiar favor, already dedicated to the service of the Temple; and their attendance on Apis, and inhalation of his breath, inspired them with the knowledge of futurity; as his presence gave to them poetic art and fire. Some, though but a few, had been adopted by

the Hermetic Baptism — covered with the Red Garment—and lain in the Mystic Coffin, while making the miraculous response. These, in after life, would be placed in the highest class, not only of the initiated, but also of the more secret, more unattainable Hermesian Philosophers. Too young to be easily diverted from their games, they continued their play and lisping songs, while the two grave and aged men passed by. Severed wide by wisdom, meeting and connected by purity, were these baby attendants, and grey-bearded visitors, of the Hall of Apis.

Guided only by the soft steps of the Guardians,—not daring to uncover his face, nor to raise his eyes,— the King moved towards the mild and beautifully-formed milk white ox which was meekly standing at the upper end of the court. Languidly turning his full eyes first on one, then the other, of the sleek-necked heifers in the different chambers ranged round, he stood there, too indolent and passive even to answer the many murmured lowings of his gentle companions. As the Guardian Priests approached, he quietly lowered his head, and put his broad, starred forehead into the hand of the foremost. Sethos knelt ; silent

through awe. Amenophis raised his hand to his mouth, but stood erect; for something within him ever rebelled against this particular worship; and seemed to stiffen his knees into iron, that he should not prostrate himself before the hoof of a dumb beast. Had he not known that the God Apis was only a living symbol of the sun—this, again, but the physical symbol of the vivifying power of nature;—had he not known that, originally, the Bull had been chosen as the particular emblem, simply because in the Month of the Ox, or in other words, the Month of Ploughing, Spring, and renewed life and fertility, spread over the earth, and enwrapped it in her robe of green, flower-gemmed,—yet the heart of Amenophis would of itself have been sufficient teacher as to the fitness or unfitness of his religious forms.

This worship of the Bull was, in point of fact, the beginning and the end of the Egyptian worship. It was the deification of the Principle Life; which life was the Soul of the Universe,—Nature's true and only God.

Sethos was not one of the Priests to whom was entrusted the whole truth of the mysteries of the religion of Amun, and he worshiped Apis as God.

The professors and teachers of this religion were divided into two distinct classes,—the active and contemplative,—the originators and the followers,—the teachers and believers. And those, whose superior boldness led them to look deeper than the more timid or conscientious, were wise enough to keep their discoveries for the participation of kindred spirits alone ;—and satisfying the humble and childly-minded with such portions, only, as it was absolutely necessary to impart, kept the more abstract and dangerous truths shrouded in type and symbol. But the natural consequence of this fraud on the one side, and blind devotion on the other, was, that of the Ministers of the Temple half were destitute of religion,—atheists—without the belief in any God ; while the other veiled their reason, and believed in follies at which a babe's intellect would revolt, from the palsyng influence of unasking trust in an unintelligible faith.

“ O King ! unveil thy face ! ” said one of the Priests in a subdued tone, “ for the eyes of the Holy Steer are on thee ! ”

Sethos lowered his robe ; but dared not look up. Holding forth a small and scented cake, he presented it to the ox, exclaiming :—“ Dread

and Holy!--vouchsafe thy favor unto thy servant! Show him the end of his way, and whither it leadeth,—whither to evil or to good, —to disgrace or to victory!"

The bull, as if in answer to this prayer of the true, though blinded, heart, gave out a very sweet and melodious sound; and fixing his mild looks on the kneeling Monarch, took the cake from his hand, without hesitation.

Tears started into the eyes of the King. "The Gods are merciful," he said in an almost inarticulate tone. "My soul! give them thy best blessing---thy truest thanksgiving---for I deserve not their favor, neither merit I their grace! Yet for my peoples' sake, O Gods! preserve your goodness unto me! For the sake of your wide altar,---the Land of the Tree,---be ye merciful to me! Oh! let not the impure Gentile overrun and lay waste the soil which Osiris and Isis have blessed with their living presence!"

"The Gods have these three times said unto thee, yea, and be blessed!" said Amenophis. "By the voice of the Adytum, and the Word of the Oracle, and now again, by the Acceptance of Apis, have they shewed thee the sign. Go on thy way, then, rejoicing; and of bold

and glad spirit. For their words are true, and their promises they shall surely keep!"

The Bull, Apis, advancing a few steps, came and stood close to the King; and putting down his head thrice licked his hand.

"It would be sin to doubt further!" cried Sethos, springing to his feet; with a flash of boldness, almost like inspiration, glowing on his face and beaming from his eyes. "Great Deities! I thank ye! But with my deeds will I thank ye best! An altar of your enemies will I raise up before ye, from whence shall smoke up the everlasting fragrance of the incense of thanksgiving---the offering of Gratitude! Bold as the lion of the desert will I forward, and prevail against the Assyrian, though his might be as the might of the hosts of the sky. With slings, and with stones, I will cast down the brave spearmen, and slay the proud horsemen; and their swords shall not smite, and their javelins shall not pierce, neither shall they be defended with their bucklers, for I come in the power of Phtha, and with the Acceptance of Apis!"

"And thou goest too, O Sethos! in the power of the right," said Amenophis, "and against this, what can stand?"

“The God hath retired,” observed one of the attendants, whispering mysteriously, and pointing to where the Sacred Ox was slowly entering one of the chambers on the right hand.

Panels of ebony inlaid with ivory—alternating with those of carved pictures—formed the walls of these chambers for the heifers. Carpets and rugs of a thick and soft material, brought from Lydia and the Vale of Casimere, were strewed over the marble floor. Large vessels of chased gold held clear water, or fine bread, or a heap of flowery grass, newly cut from the verdant fields of the Nile-Valley, for the solacement and delight of the young cow. Beds of fragrant herbs, glistening with dew and starred with sweet flowers, invited the sleek, white animal to repose ; who, as if fully conscious of the place which she held, moved about majestically, and turned her mild, full-orbed head with a slow, inquiring look, like the tame Bird of Eyes, when called by its master. Garlands of lotus buds were hung round her neck ; and her hoofs and horns were tipped with gold, and wreathed with flower-chains.

“The God hath retired. We may not re-

main longer. Only when he chooses, himself, to come out into the free court may he be looked upon. In the chambers he is not to be approached. Yet behold, O King! he hath entered on the right hand; and thou knowest that this sign doth indeed betoken weal and success to the Land of Khem! Blessed in truth art thou, Sethos, thou beloved of the Gods!"

"My mission is ended, and my wish is accomplished," returned Sethos. "With gladness and trust do I now withdraw from the Holy Presence, another man than when I entered!"

"Thy vision then was powerless? Nay! thou didst not mean this, O my king!"

"Not powerless, pious Amenophis!—for had it not been for that, with my head veiled, and my hands bound, I would have sat still in my chamber, and waited for death from Sennacherib!"

"Ah!" replied Amenophis, sorrowfully; "Hast thou then nothing within, that would have bid thee be of good courage? Must inspiration ever come from without?—from dream and from omen—while the heart is silent?"

"Thy words are riddles, Amenophis! I may not know them!"

"Best not—best not! They are but thoughts that passed, unbidden, through the portal of my lips. To other men they are of no meaning. They are not worthy of explanation, O Sethos. Let them be."

"I know that thou art one of the Priests of the Temple," said Sethos; "and that much is open unto thee, which to others is as the sealed fountian not yet known to the Mournful Bird. I know thou dost tower above us all in wisdom—that thou art a man of giant-statured mind—and I would that thou didst impart some of thy wisdom unto me."

"That science which thou dost covet, as deeming it above thine own, others possess in more abundant measure," replied Amenophis. "Amasis of Thebes, for one, is my equal—nay, my superior in such. The other knowledge cannot be imparted in words. Born and nourished here," he added, laying his hand over his heart: "by this alone, can it be understood; and not through the schooling of another; but by its own lessons. Behold the entrance door!"

"The God hath been gracious! The God

hath been gracious !” simultaneously burst from all the priests, as the king, with firm tread and erect bearing, issued from the porch. “Hail ! all hail, thou blessed of the Gods ! Let the sound of the instruments go forth, and the voice of the song awake, and pour out their notes of gladness, and their words of joyfulness ! The land shall be spared ! The Temple shall be guarded, and its holy things preserved inviolate, for the Gods of our Egyptian home will not forsake their sons, nor leave their altar undefended !”

And loud pealed the instruments ; and high rose the song ; and white, waving arms threw up the clashing cymbals in exulting triumph. And from some eyes rained glad tears, which fell to the ground below, brighter than the jewels of the morning dew ; and from others, flashed rays, which put the very sunlight to shame for dimness.

“Blessed be the Gods of Egypt, the Pure Land ! Sethos and his companions shall be saved !” cried the choristers, in a wild strain. “Not a grass-blade of the Valley of the Nile shall be trodden under foot of the Gentile ; but the blood of the invaders and their allies, shall

crimson the waves of the mighty river. For the Gods have promised !”

“ Oh ! Psammetichus, Psammetichus !” murmured Nitocris, “ Why hast thou done wrong ? Why hast thou cast off thy sweet bands of brotherhood in virtue, and of love in fidelity, and flung thyself alone into the pit of sin and misery ? What led thy noble heart astray ? Unto what seducing demon hast thou given heed ? For sure, thine own thoughts were ever pure as the stars of heaven ! Ah ! why didst thou listen to these words of Typho, and shut up thine ears from the pleadings of thy soul ? It was not well of thee, Psammetichus ! Alas ! alas ! this cry of the nation’s joy is the cry of thy doom. This song of triumph is thy death-dirge ; and I, thy beloved, for whom thou wouldst die—I, thy friend, who would lay her bleeding heart at thy feet—must bear her part in all,—and in blessing her gods and her father, invoke sorrows and punishments on thee ! Oh ! why hast thou sinned ? Why hast thou so struck me with the blow of thy transgressions ?”

“ My child, thou art paler than befits a day of rejoicing,” said Amenophis. “ Thy heart is

sick? Poor maid, early hath grief, the lot of life, fallen to thee!"

"Holy father, doth not thy teaching set forth an oft-neglected truth, that the acts of men make their own joys or sorrows?" exclaimed a deep voice, and Psammetichus stood beside them, "That foreign and outward events are oft-blamed, where the wrong was with self, and its deeds?"

"Not in all things, O Noble! We cannot do always that which we would. And we must often suffer sorrows, almost too deep for the heart to bear, from events over which we ourselves had no control."

"Ah, true, true, father! too true! And that which we would is seldom seen through that which we must!"

"Nay, Psammetichus," said Nitocris, in a low voice; "Nought can palliate evil. I trust not him who saith, 'My intention was pure, but my deeds are wicked.' Though it cost a man his life, let him boldly do his heart's virtuous thought!"

"Which I have done, Nitocris; which I am now doing; and which is costing me even more than life—thy esteem."

"O Psammetichus! will nothing convince

thee, and open thine eyes to the truth? Wilt thou still, stiff of heart, fight against thy country, thy king, and thy gods, and call this good?"

"Thou art cruel to tear my soul thus," replied the Noble, pressing his clasped hands on his breast. "Thou dost abuse thy power in thus dealing out such tortures to my sinking soul!"

"Do I so?" she said mournfully; then turning away, she whispered. "And ah! I deal worse to myself, in each cold look and harsh word that I give unto thee!"

"And now, my brave and noble boy! hie thee straight to Thebes," said Sethos, laying his hand on the shoulder of Osorchon. "Stay not even to accompany me to the palace, but swift of foot, and bold of speech, do thy utmost in this hour of our country's need. For though the Gods have sworn their help, they will not aid the sluggard, but the diligent. Gather all under my banner, the worm and the eagle together—and say to them these words from the mouth of the Oracle of Phtha, 'Choicest wine poured into coarse vessels honors, and makes them of good service.' So,

noblest offices granted to the meanest in rank makes these equal to the highest and proudest !”

“Thou hast taught me this lesson once before, to-day ; and then by glorious practice !” exclaimed Osorchon. “The poor foreigner whom thou hast exalted, is the coarse vessel which thou hast filled with rich wine. And when thou shalt come again to prove and take delight in thy treasure,—by the Gods I swear it ! thou shalt find it pure and unspoiled !”

“I trust thee, boy ! I trust thee ! Now depart ; and neither stop nor stay till the Hundred Gates receive thee. Yoke the fleetest horses of the plains to thy chariot, and spare not the lash nor the goad. With my blessing as king, priest, and father, over thee, address thyself to thy task, and work faithfully.”

“And Tathlyt, the Pigmy and Misshapen, hast thou never a word to speed him on his way ?” said the Dwarf softly. Clothed in a hieraphor’s dress—the large garment concealing the whole of his person—he had mingled with the procession, and now came to Sethos, with a cunning smile of intelligence playing round his lips. “Under the valiant Osorchon—I, too, with the favorable speech of my

king—will set my face toward the Abode of Amun. For thither I am called. And wilt thou not give me one of those rare blessings, of which thou must have such plenty, when thou canst fling them away on such as thy brave fanbearer?" and he laughed sneeringly.

"Go to! go to!" exclaimed the King. "My best blessing is my permission for thy departure. A double blessing," he added in an under tone. "One to thee, granting thee thy will; and one to me, that I am rid of thee!"

"And to Osorchon, O holy King! by the same reasoning, the greatest blessing of all; as my presence will serve as a make-weight, and a balance to keep him steady. Laden as he is with top-heavy honors, he needs something to keep his feet on the earth!"

"Thou art harsh, O Priest!" said Osorchon reddening.

"Peace!" replied the Dwarf sharply. "thou double self of folly! I am impatient with this boy!" he said to himself, half reproachfully. "But I cannot see the noble-hearted Psammetichus thrust down for such a toy; and I cannot watch the quivering lip of Nitocris, nor gaze on her soft eye dimmed with tears that come in spite of

her proud struggles to repress them—and look patiently on all *his* brightness! And I cannot see with calmness they whom I love, sink down in sorrow and darkness, while this petted child rides high and revels!” Then turning to the young soldier, he said authoritatively. “I, too, am of thy train to the City of a Hundred Gates!”

CHAPTER IX.

THE SAGE'S LOVE. THE MIDNIGHT INTERVIEW.

“LYSINOË:—WILT THOU BE FREE?”

“MY Lysinoë!—my Beautiful!” murmured Amasis tenderly, as, arrived at the gate of the garden court of the temenos, he leaned for a moment against its pillars; and clasping his hands looked up into the dark sky, with a fervid, impassioned gaze;—the whole fire of his mighty love blazing out in his dilated eyes. His powerful frame was relaxed, and his haughty tread unsteady; while his whole attitude and expression bore the impress of an

intense and overpowering passion. "Now, out on thee, for a child and a weakling, Amasis, thou preacher of wisdom!" he said, half aloud. "Is this trembling fool the lofty philosopher?---this raver talking his love-sick phantasies to the Star of Thoth, the calm sage secure from the assaults of the mean man's petty passions? Nay! I may chide myself till the morning dawn, and the young Hourries fresh from his lotus-throne, and even until the robe of darkness again veils the light of the sun above,—but all could not loosen that Arab girl's magic bands! I know that she hath me beneath her foot; and that she hath made me, from a scorner of the influence of love, become a fond boyish lover, whose rose-bud dreams of youth were tame and dim when compared with his manhood's feelings. I tremble before her;—her voice thrills through every nerve; the glance of her eye unmans me, and reduces me to the weakness of a sickly girl;—a tear falls on my heart like a scorching fire-drop;—a smile—ah! would that this were ever turned on me! On others—a bird—her flowers,—the stars,—her young gazelle,—her lute,—all can win that sweet sad smile, which passes over her face as though these

were so many mirrors, wherein she saw reflected the shadow of that glory, and the image of that beauty, from which her soul was originally shaped. And yet for me, who am the Lord of her Planet of Life,—into whose hands she hath fallen, not as the captive, but as the being to whom was entrusted part of Amasis,—for me, who am not so much her master, as her double-self,—the voice, of which she is the echo,—the form of which she is the spirit,—she hath but coldness and severity! And yet I would die,—aye, die now in my manhood's glorious strength—did she but smile on me in my death,---did she but come, soft and gentle as she is to all else, and cradle my fainting head on her sorrowing bosom. Yet ah!--would she grieve? Would one tear flow from those proud eyes, if she beheld me at her feet---failing---dying---dead? Gods! I cannot bear the thought of that cold, unmoved look gazing on me then, stern and still as though it were a statue. Lysinoë! Lysinoë! By thine Egyptian name do I call on thee to love thine Egyptian Lord! May my curses light upon those spells and charms which have not been able to work me this! Of what avail are mystic number and mystic amulet, and golden telesme, and

perfumed invocation, if they have not procured me the love of Lysinoë? Oh! maid!—dearest---most beautiful---best-loved of all who ever trod this earth as young manifestations of the Great Spirit of Beauty—brighter than all those fabled incarnations of the heavenly, which the mad enthusiast deems real,---why hast thou turned away thy heart from me?—why hast thou closed thy soul against the reception of love? It will not avail thee, Lysinoë! My star which at thy birth, for the first time looked on me as a Perfect Creation, hath told it out to the listening heavens that thou must love me,—that thou must be mine own! Aye, poor bird!—beat thy fluttering wings, and wail thy plaintive note! Thou dost mistake the bondage of affection for captivity—and blindly yearnest after the desolation of loneliness, which thou wilt still obstinately name, dear liberty! And now I will hasten to thee, and prove thy humour of to-night. Pray the dear Athor it be changed from that of this morning; else thou wilt drive me mad outright! And yet I must forgive thee much, for thou art one of the free-born race, and now art named a slave; thou art a worshipper of the Firegod, and a kneeler before the stars,—and now art a

forced participator in the mummeries of the Amun lie! Well mayst thou be wayward, poor maid! Yet if thou didst but love me all would be changed. Then all would be happiness for thee; and lily buds would glisten, where now thorns and briars pierce thy flying feet! Would that thou didst love me! Alas! alas! would that thou didst love me!" and so saying, he entered the garden court.

He walked on for some moments, with rapt looks now turned upwards; as if holding communion with those radiant spheres, now sunk low to the ground, as if all hope had flagged,---a prey to emotions nigh strong enough to tear his very life asunder. Suddenly he halted. A strange noise struck his ear. It was not the boughs of the waving acacia tree; it was not the hum of the wheeling insects, fluttering round the flowers, keeping guard over their young beauty, and defending them from harm; it was not the shrill cry of the startled bird, whose rest some pale shape had broken, as it flitted between the painted dream, and the soul of the soft sleeper; it was not one of the sweet sounds of nature, when she has laid her head upon the lap of night, and veiled her eyes in the star-spangled robe of her dusk

sister,—but it was a sound the more discordant inasmuch as the sceue spoke only of loveliness. “It is not the voice of any beast that I know,” thought Amasis. “It is more like the cry of the hyena, and the growl of the panther commingled!”

The sound was repeated; but this time a human accent was mingled with it.

“If it be a man, let him look to it! For he that comes within the temenos full of lusty life, and comes unbidden, quits it again on a bier! Ha! it is as I thought!” he cried aloud. For catching the glare of two fiery eyes gleaming through the leaves on the brink of the water-tank, he saw the black form of a man crouching within. “Come out into the light that I may know thee, and stand up that I may tell thee, and who thou art. Shame on thee, to lurk there, like a beaten hound! Tush! thou art a craven, and must be whipped forth! Lie still now. Thou canst not escape. Lie still; while I go to summon the thong-bearers, who shall drive thee forth!”

The Priest walked leisurely from the thicket towards the pylon of the next court; but instead of entering, he concealed himself behind the colossal figure that stood near the pyramidal moles.

It was a heinous crime for an unblest foot to tread the Sacred Enclosure at unsacrificial hours, more especially at nightfall, when wrong and robbery stalk abroad so boldly, and darkness seems to invite crime, by its tacit promise of concealment—crime's highest gain. And Amasis, although he scoffed at the spirit of the law—for the nocturnal doings of the Hierophant were not always such as could be published abroad, unless treason, and sedition, and impiety, and immoralities, had been mere boyish follies with the Egyptians, enforced its obedience the most rigorously of all ; perhaps the more so because of those doings !

He had not waited long before the branches were pushed aside, and a huge head, with matted red hair starting out in every direction, and writhing like fiery snakes over its flat and spreading expanse, thrust itself cautiously out. A pair of bleared, ferret eyes peered round to spy if danger were lurking near. All was still and lonely ; and with the leap of a wild cat, out sprung a man, small and deformed, whose limbs were twisted and contorted like the branches of a palm-tree, over which the Evil Genii have brooded.

Amasis strode forward, and before the

Dwarf could utter a cry had him down on the ground—his knee against the deformed chest.

“I will teach thee how to enter the Sacred Enclosure another night!” he said, tightening his grasp on the wretch’s throat.

“Mercy, Lord, mercy!” was all that the fallen man could utter.

“Mercy, thou thieving night-hawk!—mercy for what?”

“For thyself!” groaned the Dwarf. “In me thou art slaying thyself!”

Amasis involuntarily slackened his hold.

“That is well!” said the Dwarf drawing a deep breath. “There! Now I can breathe again! Take thy knee from off my chest, for I have much to say to thee, Amasis, thou High Priest of Amun! And a giant himself could not speak with such a weight upon him!”

“Ha! if thou knowest me, who then art thou, miserable slave that thou art? Who art thou that dares say he has aught to do with Amasis? Has the Hierophant of Amunrà so mean acquaintance?”

“Nay! if thou use me so, I can never live to tell thee! Let me stand up. Bind mine

arms, but let me free from thy gripe. Thou hast not a mass of stone in thy grasp, Lord, but a man, made of the same nerves and feelings as thou thyself ! Thou wilt spare the executioner all further trouble, if thou holdest me long thus. Let me free, else thou wilt slay me !”

“ I will not let thee free,” answered the Priest coldly. “ The game which I have snared, I will not loose for all its cries.”

“ As thou wilt then ! Thou art the stronger ! While life remains I can but tell thee, that the papyrus roll wherein are written the names of thy friends in the camp of the Assyrian, and the names of thy allies amongst the rebel nobles, together with wonderful accounts of some curious experiments, made on various small animals—all for charity, to cure their sleeplessness—that roll I have given to Sethos, the King. And I have given it with a prayer that he would open and read it, should harm befall me at Amunei. Wilt thou now let me free ?”

Amasis stood up, and allowed the Dwarf also to rise ; but still kept his hold on his bossy shoulder. He was pale, and a few drops stood upon his forehead and upper lip ; but

his face was unchanged in its proud expression.

“How didst thou come by this strange roll?” he asked in a steady voice, and with as much indifference as though it had been the most trivial question, not affecting him more than the dweller of the Scythian forests.

The Dwarf never heeded the words; but shaking himself like a huge dog after a rough play with rough playmates, passed his shrivelled hands down his sides, and felt all his limbs.

“I thought thou hadst broken them,” he said savagely. “Thou art none so light a burden for an old man’s carcase to bear. I wonder that thy manhood did not blush at so unequal a contest! And thy fingers, too, are as stern as the lion’s paw when he bids the tiger good morrow! Thou oughtest not to use aged men thus!—and thou so strong, and hale and lusty, while I am weak and crippled! Why thy fist could slay an army such as I!” And he glared angrily at the Hierophant.

“Peace!” cried Amasis. “Down on thy knees and thank me for thy worthless life, rather than stand clattering thine ape’s-tongue in such follies! The very touch of Amasis,

stern as the lion's paws or soft as the caress of the young kid, honors a thing which my tongue refuses to name a man."

The Dwarf looked up with a mocking smile, like a blight passing over his face ; but gradually, as he looked, an almost sorrowful expression took its place. Amasis was so loftily, so wonderfully beautiful ! And though it be joined to every crime that sullies the air, the power of beauty is never destroyed. There is something in loveliness which speaks to the very soul—something that makes a cloak—a covering for sin—as if it were indeed an emanation from that Holy Sphere with which guilt has nought to do. Amasis stood there against the dark sky, like some majestic column towering above all its fellows. The Dwarf lowered one hand to his knee, and with the other touched his lips. "Lord !" he said in a moved tone, "thou art too grand for crime !"

"What words are these ?" cried Amasis haughtily. "Art thou mad, or hast thou drunk until thy swinish senses have forsaken thee, that thou dost presume to say such words to me ?"

"No ! no, Lord !—I cannot call thee Holy Father !—I am neither mad, nor yet drunken.

I am an old man—a dwarf—a contemptible, a mean thing—one, on whom Typhon hath set his mark—an impure creation, unblessed by Osiris—unacceptable to the Great Mother—a being nursed in the lap of Buto, and forgotten by the shaping hand of Phtha; and thou art Pontiff of Thebes, High Priest of Amun the Great God of the Land of Khem, a noble and a beautiful man, whose peer doth not exist. Yet I dare say to thee, thou art too grand for crime? I dare raise the voice of virtue to censure thy deeds of vice! Ah! thou wert never made for thy deeds! Thou art false to thy nature, to the mother that bore thee, and the Gods that gave thee life, when thou doest wicked and unholy things!”

“And what sins of the Hierophant, what failing of the Hermesian Philosopher, may have so shocked the slave’s piety?” asked Amasis scornfully. “But I blush for myself!” he added, “I blush that I have so far forgotten my place, as to bandy words with one to whom I should summon my slaves, that he might be bound for the morrow’s execution! Thou mayest accuse me of crime; but thy tongue torn out by its bleeding roots, and hurled in thy face, shall teach thee whether it were wise in thee. Come! I would end

this tedious conference ! My slaves shall now be thy speech-mates."

"Nay, Lord ! thou art spell-bound ; and thou *must* stay and listen to the old man ! I have a talisman in the name of that roll which can lower the high tone of thy pride ! Aye ! and even set me on a height equal to thine own ! Nay !" he continued vehemently, and stamping his foot as the Priest was about to make some reply, "I will not suffer thee to speak. I am thine equal—yea ! and thy superior ! I am Tathlyt of Memphis !"

Amasis slightly started.

"I have heard that name," he then said quietly. "But I knew not that its bearer was the equal of the lowest priest of the Outer Court—not to speak of the Pontiff—the Anointed Hierophant."

"Think what thou wilt," returned Tathlyt. "The whole voice of the nation places the Memphite Dwarf on the higher pinnacle !"

"I do not argue for precedence !" said the Priest haughtily. "Say thy will, and be swift of speech ; for I have business on hand."

"Business !" repeated Tathlyt bitterly. "The business of bringing tears to the young eyes which should only gleam with joy, and sorrow to the young heart

which should only throb with delight. This is thy night's weighty business! The poor maid! A sorry trade is hers; for she sells sighs and tears to Death for his sleep, and he will not pay her! And yet she hath given enough to buy a nation's ransom! Aye, Priest! one tear from those starry eyes is worth all the jewels of the Mountain mine. And how many has not thy cruelty wrung forth! Shed, alas! in vain! What can a young girl's tears work on the marble heart of a proud and selfish man? She might better hope to make the desert sands verdant with grass and flowers!"

"Thou art a bold man, thus to place thy hand upon the cockatrice, den," said Amasis with a calm voice, but flashing eyes. "What has thou to do with me? What with my captive? May not the Priest of Amun order his household, unmolested by the screeching tongue of a vile dwarf? But, that thou art too loathsome in thy presence to be the shrine of any sweet feeling, I should have branded thee as the secret lover of her, over whom thou dost so lament. Thy words are too warm for cold friendship; and under the burning sun of Egypt that chill feeling does not

usurp the place of love! Love? Thou and that? oh! it is past a jest;—it is a loathly mockery!”

“Saidst thou a lover?—that *I* am the lover of Lysinoë? Thou art right! I am indeed a lover; but not such an one as art thou. *I* love her as a mother dove loves her young; as a flower loves its bud—a seed its tender shoots, when it wraps them up in its soft green bosom, and protects them from the worm, and the rough stone; thou art the fowler that snareth the frightened bird; the ruthless idler that plucketh the sweet blossom, then casteth it away, as a vile weed that he himself hath tarnished:—the raven that teareth up the earth, and bruises the soft green covering, and stealeth the young shoots. Which love dost thou think is the best? To which would a maiden cling? although the giver of the one shines glorious as a God come down from the empyræan, and the giver of the other scowls hideous as a child of Typhon!”

“Quit thy talk of my household!” cried Amasis trembling with suppressed rage, “else thou shalt rue thy prate in death! Dost thou deem me a child—a fool—a dastard slave that thou shouldst beard me thus?”

Dost thou know me and mine office? Dost thou know my power?"

"Amasis! Amasis! I know thee all too well! I know too many of thy secrets, to dread thy threats; and I have too much confidence in the powers which the Gods have bestowed especially upon me, to care for thy menaces. I am thy equal. I am thy master. And thou needest not play the Pure, Invincible Hierophant with me; for I have thy life here in the grasp of this shrivelled hand, and I can quench it when I will. Aye! and by the Snake of the Egg I will extinguish thy flame of being for ever, if thou dost not take better heed!"

Amasis, for all reply, seized the old man by the throat, and flung him heavily against the tank. The blood gushed from the wounded temples of the Dwarf, and stained the Holy Water of the Sanctuary. He lay stunned.

"Shall I accomplish it?" thought Amasis, as he looked at the closed eyes and pallid features of Tathlyt.

A cloud passed over the moon; and the only sound that he heard, was the faint trickling of blood, as the drops slowly fell into the

fountain-tank. One more blow, and all would be over.

“ Shall I accomplish it ? ”

The Black Eagle swooped low over the Priest. His beak was crimson. Had he been feasting on some yet living heart ? The vulture screamed, as he flapped his heavy wings, and stretched out his unclean neck ; and the Bat of the Thebaid circled the Temple's walls. The cloud still rested over the moon. Amasis stood in the darkness ; the Dwarf lay stunned—his blood flowing.

A little, sweet laugh broke through the air—a maiden's shrill, childlike laugh ; and the sound of the merry crotala was heard, as the echo to the sweet laugh.

“ Nay ! nay ! my pretty Eirene ! ” cried a manly voice. “ Thou dost not know the meaning of life. Thou canst not spell it ! ”

“ In truth not ? ” said the small, birdlike note. “ But thou art wrong, Zminis ! I both know and can spell it ! ”

“ And what is it ? ”

“ LOVE ! ” said the girl.

And the Dancing maids passed on.

The hand of Amasis unclasped its hold :

he stooped down, and dashed some water over the Dwarf's face. The cloud passed; and once again in life the Magic Name prevented crime.

"And if thou hadst killed me," said the Dwarf hardily, after he had recovered himself, and now sat upon the edge of the waters, bathing his wound; "thou wouldst have only been in a worse plight. Sethos has the roll. And thou wouldst have found him a harsher scribe than even Tathlyt."

"The breath of Typhon blight the roll!" cried Amasis hastily.

"If thou wilt trust such villains as Chebron, thy learned poison-distiller, with free entrance into thy private chambers, thou must expect to be trapped in thy own snares!"

"Chebron? Chebron the Scribe, saidst thou?" exclaimed the Priest. "What meanest thou? What hast thou to do with Chebron?"

"The Gods be thanked, I have not much to do with him!" said the Dwarf. "I wish not to sully my hands with so great filthiness, that I may not cleanse them again! And there is not pitch in the wide Valley of the Nile, the touch of which pollutes so much as

the comradeship of Chebron the Scribe! But hast thou never heard of the wondrous power which we Dwarfs of Memphis—by the favor of Phtha our tutelar Deity, pigmy and misshapen as ourselves—possess over that which is hidden from other men?” continued the old man whispering mysteriously. “How, but through this his especial gift—granted in larger measure to me than to others—how else should I have known of thy dealings with Chebron; of thy persecution of thy Chaldean slave, Lysinoë; of thy hatred to Sethos, and desires after his Double Crown; of thy rebellious incitements, and traitor communications with Sennacherib? And, O Amasis!” And here his voice was fearfully distinct, as he raised his hand threateningly, “how else should I have known of thy atheism...impiety...blasphemy...of thy Denial of the Gods; of thy utter unfitness for a Priestly Office? How, but through this mysterious gift of supernatural insight?”

By a desperate effort the Hierophant maintained his outward composure, though every vein seemed filled with flame—burning with the intensest indignation. He, the proud man before whom the monarch himself shrunk into

insignificance, and the noblest of the land humbled his brow—to be obliged to wait there, and hearken to such language from such a speaker ! What greater torture was there for the haughty spirit ?

“ Thou knowest a rare alphabet,” he said in that peculiarly still tone which proves the presence of passion. “ Yet thou little dreamest that it spells thine own destruction !” And he put out his hand to seize him. A leap—a bound—and the Dwarf had shot up the pillar of the first pylon, and stood on the square abacus, exultingly pointing his long fingers at the Priest, and laughing.

“ Thou hast not caught the Memphite Rat asleep,” he said. “ Look better next time ! Fare thee well, Priest until we meet again. Lo ! that will be a weighty meeting, if the tale which the stars tell of thy destinies be true ! To-morrow, with the first shafts of dawn, will peal forth the trumpet of the king’s messenger, calling all men to honor. To-morrow, and to-morrow, and yet a score more ; and unto what wilt *thou* be called ? Return to the ways of virtue which thou hast left, else wilt thou be summoned to a fearful reckoning ! Return ! ere the doom of thy dishonor

be sealed ! We meet again. Then, differently to what we have done this night. Then, when knowing better who was thy garden guest, thou mayest perchance lament thine inhospitable reception ! The name of Tathlyt has carried no weight with it for thee ; we will see what his deeds can effect !”

And while Amasis yet looked, the Dwarf vanished like a lightning flash which has sped the world round, ere its presence had been clearly seen.

Amasis turned away as calm and as unmoved, as if he had but watched the flight of a night-haunting raven, and he went through the propylæum. Something glittered on the shining stone, close to his foot. He stooped to see it nearer. It was a small golden box of the most elaborate workmanship, wrought in the form of a lute, the handle being a beautiful female figure, bearing the instrument across her bosom. Seven strings of silver worked into the gold, formed the lid, which opened by means of a spring concealed in the neck of the lute. Something had pressed on this spring, for the box was lying opened on the ground, with a heap of rare and curious things poured out beside it. A

collection of the smallest leaves which men's fingers could fashion—so small, that, though formed of the white metal from the Western Isles, their weight had not overladen a honey-seeking bee. They were leaves of trees, some of which Amasis knew; but others were foreign to him. They were strung together on a cord of linen, with evident meaning and regularity. But they were all so wonderfully executed—every thread and fibre was so perfect—every chasing was so sharp and clear—that they looked the work of genii rather than the productions of man's coarser touch. Amasis smiled when he saw them, and exclaiming, "A miniature speech from thee, my brave Druid!" he was gathering the whole into his hands, when, with the same noise which he had heard from the acacia bushes, the Dwarf suddenly re-appeared. Whence, or how, the Priest could not know. He tore the tin leaves from the Hierophant; but unknowingly he left one in his grasp; swung himself up the column with the agility of a wild ape, and was again out of sight.

"May a pestilence light on the man!" muttered Amasis. "I am not a thief to steal

gold and jewels ! The only robbery that I wish, Lysinoë, is that of thy heart's love ! But that madman hath my roll. That fatal roll ! Oh ! what a fool was I to trust to lock and bar rather than to the safety of my own lips ! And Chebron, too, hath then the contents ! But I must bear with him for some few days longer, until, through his means, I have gained my purpose. And then—who keeps the useless, worm-eaten garment which hath served its intention, and is no longer of service ? I will not suffer myself to be made the sport of every plotter—the mocked at of every scorner. I am surely too high set for that ! And yet, why should I fear ? Have I not drunk of that Golden Drink—which the Foreign Man from the Central Flowery Land instructed me to make ? But vulnerable or immortal, I am Amasis still ; and the herd shall honor, aye and worship me as a God !” And he drew himself up to the full height of his commanding figure ; and looked, in truth, more deity than man. “ And now I will forget all this. To Lysinoë, my Beautiful ! And if she smile, all will be bright. If she frown, and receive my love with anger, my fairest

prospects would fail, and my sunniest sky look dark. Oh! what fools doth this love of woman make us !”

He returned to the first pylon, or gateway, which led into the Grand Dromos of Sphynxes, and opening the gate, looked for some time down the long, paved way. Then satisfied that all was still, he re-entered.

This pylon was a building of the most surpassing beauty. The pyramidal moles, formed of the rose-coloured granite of Syene, were covered with hieroglyphics, as delicately cut as if they had been gems of the Amulet Rings--and the colossal heads of Amun-rà on the upright jambs, might have challenged the whole Valley of the Nile to show superior skill or beauty. At the base were two crio-sphynxes, of greater size than any of those which stood on each side of the Dromos, and the never-failing obelisks, towering above all, rose at a short distance. The capitals of the pillars were made of the four faces of Isis—one of the most pleasing, yet peculiar forms of Egyptian architecture. The architrave was profusely ornamented; the winged globe and serpent being in the centre of the frieze, while a row of asps, each bearing a disk on

its head, beaded the outer edge, and made a frame-work for the hieroglyphs and figures on each side of the Winged Globe. The pavement was of marble, from the quarries of distant mountains ; and it looked in the moonlight like a path-way of frozen snow, it was so pure and spotless. The whole of the pro-naos was filled with a double row of columns extending to a bewildering length, and of enormous magnitude. Every capital was different. Here, might be seen the Isiac face, repeated in its sweet, mild loveliness ; there, the graceful lotus buds and leaves, rising out of each other in successive tiers ; on this side, the calyx of the flower formed the whole capital ; on that, the palm-tree's leaves, or leaves and fruit intermixed ; or the waterplant pillars—the shafts being the stalks, bound together by hoops ; or the one plain simple plinth, without ornament or shape, excepting that of the Perfect Figure, the Square, were amongst the peculiarities of the architecture. A broad flight of steps at the further end, led up to the next gateway, which was similar to the first, but of smaller dimensions, and this led into another court with flowers and water in the midst.

Again, another pylon, decreasing still more ;

again, another court, which had a corridor of square pillars of red syenite round the sides—leaving the centre unoccupied by column, or tree, or water. And between each pillar stood the colossal statue of a king, with folded hands and closed eyes. Beyond, rose the towers of the temple, the Holy *Ædes*; the place of such wondrous wisdom, and such dark falsehood!

The light of the moon touched all the heights, and columns, and obelisks of the majestic temple, with its soft glory of still beauty. It was like the golden hair of a child sweeping over the gloomy brow of a toil-worn man. The little threads of light are woven into a lovely crown for the sullen head; and wander through the black locks, matted twine, as a clear stream welling over a place of burning. The moonbeams and that Theban Temple were strangely mated in the blue air. And yet it might have served as a lesson of this truth, that even there, as everywhere, is a resting place for Purity—even there shone the reflection of the Light of Heaven.

Instead of entering the *sekos*, or Hall of the Uninitiated, the High Priest passed between the syenite pillars and statues of basalt, and open-

ing a low door in the wall of the Temple, struck into a passage — similar to those which he had traversed some few days before, when on his way to the Scribe's cell. And, but that this lay to the right, whilst the others bore to the left, it had been hard even for Amasis himself to say, that he was not on his former track. As before, the stone-work soon blocked up farther progress; but instead of opening a way through it, the Priest stooped down, and took up a square stone slab from the ground. This opening revealed a narrow and steep flight of steps. He descended, and carefully replacing the stone, with the speed of light darted along a dark corridor; and then ascended another flight of steps, winding round in circles that seemed interminable. Unprotected by bar or balustrade, the climber's head had need be steady, for his æry path was none of the safest. Amasis halted when about mid-way; and again made himself a passage by unsliding a small pin, so artfully concealed, that only those acquainted with it could have discovered its presence. The stones rolled back — and the moment that his foot, stepping on a spring, touched the ground on the other side — again closed.

And now a flood of soft light flowed down the gleaming steps; bearing on its silver tide perfumed airs, and flattering caresses. And a warm air came creeping round the Priest, like the beseeching touch of a tender maiden. And it kissed his eyes, and fluttered round his bared throat, and waved over his brow; and it was like a Presence to him, so loving and gentle was it. And music was mingled with it. The music which itself made, in playing through the strings of harps and lutes lying about: magic, dream-like music, that woke up, as by a deep spell, visions and memories of the past, and breathed over the soul that freshness of beautiful youth, which the sultry glare of manhood's life so soon fades. And the music and odour chased each other through the waves of the clear light, like rosy children at their play: then rushed in one rich tide—as these, when, wearied with flinging buds and blossoms at each other, they lay down their dimpled limbs on the dewy grass, and cheek to cheek—their little hands entwined—mingle their baby voices in one sweet, bird-like note of joy. And the light, and the perfume, and the melody were all as spirits, sent by Lysinoë, to greet him on his coming. And they were as friends

to that Egyptian priest ; and he smiled as they met him.

And now a dazzling length of splendour stretched out before his eyes--of long, lofty chambers, with gorgeously painted roofs, and involved labyrinths of white and rose-coloured columns, round which twined climbing plants from vases below,—making a very maze of loveliness, for delight to lose herself therein. The casements on each side were opened to admit the cool night air ; and the sound of waters in the distance, while it refreshed with the visions borne with it, gave relief to a scene, which else had been too voluptuous for the soul to bear.

Scattered about were cups and vases, made of that most exquisite material known under the name of murrhine. They were formed of one entire gem, which flashed out different rays, as if some spirit of life were enshrined in those transparent cells,---as if they were more than mere jewels. Their ethereal nature could not bear the presence of heat. For heat being, itself, the Breath of the Empyræan, might not touch those substances which partook of the congenial nature of celestialty, and leave them still in the power of cold, hard matter ; but must rather, from the force of sympathy and

attraction, dissolve their scarce congealed bonds of substance, and absorb the released spirit. As souls, when the body is dying, are drawn upward to their original home, and return to their original state of incorporeity, swifter in the warm south-wind, than in the chill northern blasts. And side by side with these, were other cups, some of the pigeon's neck porcelain, and some so shy and delicate, that their pictured beauties could only be seen when veiled with wine, or the fresh Nile-water.

At intervals, bronze or golden censers steamed up magic perfumes. They were of the most beautiful shapes;—some formed as flowers, the scent rising from the bell, where the downy stamina reared their yellow heads, and shook to the voice of the winds;—others, as vases borne on the heads of female water-carriers, or foreign slaves with plumed head-dress and jewelled raiment; and others, again were in the form of light chariots drawn by the unbridled wild horses of the Plains. Some were simple cups, the covers of which were surmounted by a phoenix,—the mystic bird,—whose feathers glistened in the light with every shade and colour, and who bore in his golden beak an ear of the red transparent corn, or a small date-branch, or water-plant in the

bud, or stalk of the long sharp-pointed grass, which rustled audibly, as did the plumage of the glorious bird, when shaken by the air.

Metal mirrors were hung about, reflecting back, in added numbers, the multitude of vases of every shape and material scattered round. There might be seen, though in scanty numbers, small and almost transparent porcelain vessels, the manufactures of a strange country lying far off, which the sons of the Pure Land barely knew, and which could scarce be called barbarous with the rest. The vessels were small as a child's toy, and painted with groups of figures, or flowers, or birds, or merely inscriptions, the meaning of which only the most learned of the Egyptians partially knew. Tall vases, with it may be only a single flower on the one side, and a short sentence on the other, were also the productions of that self-styled Heaven on Earth. And dried scents *of exquisite* perfume were piled up in these; whose sweetness made the lusty wind clogged and heavy, so that it could not away, but hung over them, lingering as the evening sunshine lingers on the wings of a cloud.

Lamps of glass from Memphis, or else of that beautiful pottery which rivalled the love-

liness of stone or spar, were also on the gilded tables; or set higher up in niches within the walls. Some were of a faint rose hue, with their translucent brightness softened by artificial dimness; and others were dazzling with the brilliancy of the colours, and the varied and elegant devices painted on them. Couches of every luxurious shape were about; made either of foreign woods but partially gilded, or blazing entirely of burnished gold. And rugs, like the Sacred Cushions, were spread as a resting-place for they whose limbs loved such repose. Round the walls of the chambers, or standing between the columns, like bright porteresses inviting to welcome, were statues of marble, or rose-colored porphyry, which had never been cut by the formal Egyptian chisel, but had been secretly brought from other countries,—from the countries of the impure Hellenes, and the patient worshippers of the Fire-god in the lonely mountains of Iràn, and from the Land of the Buddhist by the Ganges. But they were statues for the poet, not the philosopher; the lover, not the devotee.

Excepting on the walls and roof, not a religious sentence or allusion was visible. But these were covered with paintings and sculp-

tures expressive of various priestly mythes. Isis, with her wings guarding her consort-brother,—the impersonation of woman's protecting, though confiding love, or with the beautiful Horus in her mother's arms;—or Nofre-Atmoo springing from the leafy Persea-tree, and pouring blessings on the human souls below, as if to teach the power and holiness of Beauty;—or Neith, the noble and chaste queen;—or Athyr the seductive,—the darling of all hearts;—such gentle themes as these did the stone-leaved tablets speak of. The chambers, originally intended for some secret service of the Temple, had been converted by Amasis into his own private Halls of Delight. And as he believed that he alone knew of the various springs in the concealed doors which led to them, he felt secure in the enjoyment of the forbidden luxuries, which he had heaped up there with such lavish profusion. And Lysinoë, the Ishmaelite slave, was the queen of all. If such the casket, what must be the gem?

Amasis took little heed of all this splendour. Keeping his eyes fixed on the last chamber of the dazzling train, he hurried on, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left,

though marble shapes of extremest beauty, stood at the entrances of the other apartments, with their white arms beckoning,—as if they had been fixed by some enchanter's wand, while in the attitude of sweet invitation. At the half-closed door of this last room he stayed his rapid steps.

“Not a song to-night?” he whispered to himself.

Nay! no song, but a sob!

The blood left the flushed cheek of the Hierophant. “Still thus,—ever thus!” he cried aloud as he entered. “What can cheer that wayward heart?”

A young girl of slight, but perfectly moulded form, was kneeling before the unclosed window. Her head was laid on her small hands; and her face was hidden within a mass of heavy gold-brown hair, which fell like a veil over her polished neck and bosom. Her skin was fairer than that of the daughters of Egypt; and her eyes, of a dark deep blue, such as was never seen among the truly Eastern people, had not their languid, voluptuous glance, but were expressive of more thought, energy, and purity. Though she was one of the daughters of the Ismaelite, yet there was something in her ap-

pearance that would have spoken a different parentage—or at least a mixed descent. Too fair for the tented dweller of Arabia, yet too warm for the chill western sky, she seemed to have been formed only to centre in herself the beauties of both hemispheres. Her white dress of foreign shape was wrapped closely round her : part was left trailing on the ground, to serve as a hood or veil, if she so pleased. Round her waist was a broad girdle of dark blue stone engraven with strange characters and gemmed with small golden stars. Her feet were bare, but partly shaded by the fringe of her garment ; which gave a greater lustre to them, as upturned they lay, like sweet buds of the red lotus, on the ground. Her naked arms were devoid of ornament ; and one small chain of thin golden plates, whose end was concealed in her bosom, was the only ornament she wore, excepting the girdle which cinctured her graceful form. A lute of seven strings was thrown beside her,—the chords broken : and a chaplet of withered acacia blossoms, torn into shreds, lay near. The girl was weeping.

“ Lysinoë,” cried the priest, in a soft

tone. "What ails thee, my beloved, my beautiful?"

The maid shrunk at his voice, and trembled; cowering closer, like a bird over which the hawk is swooping.

"Nay, I will not harm thee. It is I—Amasis. Why dost thou tremble? Sure, thou knowest my voice? Come, raise thy head and look on me; for I am weary and sick, waiting for thy sight. A whole long day have I passed, and thy sweet breath hath not once passed over my brow! Now look on me, and refresh my fainting soul, Lysinoë, dearest maiden!"

Lysinoë started to her feet, and clasping her hands, cried: — "Lord, I will tend thee, and minister, humbly as a slave should, to thy slightest needs; I will not suffer my limbs to fail, nor my heart to faint, in doing thy service; only do thou, too, treat me as a slave! Speak to me harshly—sternly; bid me, as thou wouldst bid thy very dog; I will not murmur, but will do all that thou mayest command, diligently and faithfully. Only look coldly on me! Only forget not that I am thine inferior—thy servant—thy hand-maid—by whose love thou art dis-

honored—who, herself, is degraded by thine. Why break down the barrier between us? O my Lord! it keeps in a world of sorrow, which will overflow and drown all peace if thou dost remove its bounds.”

“What barrier is there between us, loveliest? What, but that which hath been raised up by thine own coldness? What, but that slight mist-wreath, which wilt melt away before the first dawn of tenderness in thy soul? This is the sole barrier, Lysinoë! And thou shalt remove its screen! Aye, frown as thou wilt; soon there shall not exist any obstacle between my love and thine!”

Lysinoë turned away her head, and pressed her hands over her eyes, then shaking back her long hair, she exclaimed, speaking rapidly and fervently: “Dost thou think, Lord, that our several conditions are no obligations to stranger bearing? Thou art the Hierophant of Thebes—the High Priest of the Grand Deity of Amunei, and thou shouldest be to all men as a light, by whose lustre they might walk; as a model in whose likeness they might shape themselves. I am a slave—a captive gained by the bow and the spear—a servant—

a Gentile—one of the tented race, who, by thy very faith, thou deemest impure and denied Eternal Being. What canst thou have to do with such an one? Thou hast but to give her thy blessing, if haply thou meet with her on thy way of life, and wish, it may be, that she knelt at the shrine of thy god. But oh! thou mayst not strive to join her opposing way with thine own! Thou art false to thine office and thy god, in loving an Arab maid: and oh! doubly false in bidding her to love thee!”

“Lysinoë, thou art wise in thy speech, and thy rosy lips, which move as the wings of the young dove when she flees to the bosom of her beloved mate, utter grave and learned things. But thou art no reasoner, bright maid! Thou art no philosopher! else wouldst thou have said, ‘I am a maiden, lovely and heavenlike, whom to see, is to love. Thou art a man, in thy manhood’s prime, and endowed with more than man’s strength of passion. And thou lovest me with all the fervour of thy ardent soul. Our states are different; but love hath made that way even between us, which chance and birth did make unequal!’ Thus, thou shouldst have said: and thus thou

should think : and act as those thoughts would bid thee. For thou knowest that there is not inferiority in love ! Love me, Lysinoë, with as burning and intense a passion as that with which I love thee, and thou wilt be the fitting mate of Amasis—slave as thou mayst be. But let the Queen of the mighty Babylon ‘herself’ tender me a love weaker than my own, she would sink into a place lower than that of Amasis. Strength—fervour—constancy—these are the crowns of empire, and rings of honor in the domain of love !”

“ When wilt thou learn to cease this ?” cried Lysinoë, angrily. “ How often have told thee that this must be a sealed subject between us ? It is not right for thee to utter such things—it is not right for me to hear them. Though I am a slave, Priest, yet I am of pure and free soul !”

“ The bondage of love will not fetter thee, sweet—nor its kiss pollute thee ! Its chain is not too hard for the frailest heart to bear ; and it makes all other bondage perfect freedom. Why not, then, lay on thy young soul the burden of affections ? All nature does the like. Her children all love, and thus fulfil the intention of their existence. Shouldst thou,

alone, be a traitress to the Great Mother, and rebellious to her will? Thou, alone, waste thy youthful years of rare beauty, which were bestowed only for joy and passion, in solitary chilliness of soul? Love, Lysinoë! — love, till thy full heart breaks with the teeming richness of its treasures—love, till life—heart—spirit—all are absorbed in one burning sigh of thy mighty passion—love, as I love—and then thou wilt do wisely and do well, and be true to the nature that is within thee! For by the glance of thy full blue eye and by the smile of thy rich lip I know and swear, that Amuun shaped thee only for this!”

“Priest—father, thou sayest that thou lovest me,” said Lysinoë, changing her former irritated manner for one of the humblest supplication. “Oh! then grant me my earnest prayer! Thou canst not love the thing which thou delightest to torture; thou canst not willingly torture the thing which thou dost love! Oh! if thou knowest that thy words are like cruel scourges to my soul, thou wilt change them, or be silent? And they are so—they are worse than the tortures of the steel and

the fire to me ! Why wilt thou use me so cruelly ? I am but a child to thee—a weak thing, which one breath of thine can slay. Thou hast lived long ; and hast had pleasure in thy life ; and hast gained the honors after which thy ambition strove ; I am young—very young—and my heart is but even now awaking to the meaning of existence. Why wilt thou cloud these, its first waking hours ? Why wilt thou stand between me and the sun ? Thou art cruel, priest ! I said to thee, ‘ Bid me serve thee as thy slave ! ’ And I will so serve thee. But oh ! do not thou look on me as aught else ! I cannot love thee, if I would ; and thy care for me but dishonors me ! ”

“ Now, by my soul, thou art too arrogant ! ” replied the Priest, haughtily. “ Amasis dishonor his Gentile slave ? Minion ! thou art honored by a glance—by a thought—by a word, however careless and trifling, from me ! I, who held myself too high for any mate but a king’s daughter, have humbled myself to thee : and then must I hear that my prayers—my entreaties to wed thee—to make thee mine own by mutual rights and mutual ties—dishonor

thee, forsooth? Lysinoë! Lysinoë!—though the brightest maidens of mine own land are too mean for me, that art not thou! I, Amasis of Thebes, will vail my brow, and humble myself below thy footstool; and offering thee that love too high for any earth-born woman, as a very craven beseech thee—the foreigner and the Gentile—to receive it! Lysinoë! wilt thou not love me? Wilt thou not turn in tenderness towards a heart that beats but for thee? Ha! the same cold, averted eye. The same proud silence. The same repelling gesture. Woman! thou wilt repent thy madness when too late; for by those stars above, I swear, that if thou dost make of Amasis thy foe, he is the bitterest and the most deadly that thou couldst have. Fool! hast thou not heard that the worst enemy is the slighted lover? That the deeper he hath loved, the deeper he abhors? Take heed, Lysinoë! Thou art on the brink of a precipice—a few steps, and thou art flung mangled into the torrent below! I am not one that every sickly girl may spur at her will, and name it—modesty! I am not one to whine like a beaten hound, and lick the hand that strikes me! Nay! though even that hand be thine!”

“ And, Amasis,” returned Lysinoë looking into his eyes with a steady gaze, proud and unflinching as his own. “ Though I am now thy captive, unlawfully stolen by thee from my rightful master, bethink thee, that I, too, am one in whose veins runs blood purer than even that of thy Monarch’s child !—the blood of heroes, priests, and kings, for unremembered ages kept unsullied, now all centered in this frail heart. Priest ! respect me, too, better ! Respect the daughter, though unfortunate, of such a godlike race !”

“ Tush ! Thy birth weighs nought with me ! Thou art my slave—and what care I, if thine idiot grand-sires wore the royal robe or no ? They do not make thee free, though they sprung from the Eight Demigods !”

“ Free ! free !” murmured Lysinoë. “ Oh ! thou shouldst not have taunted me with this ! Free ! Oh ye Gods !”

“ Forgive me, my Beloved !” exclaimed Amasis passionately, seizing her hand and covering it with burning kisses in spite of her efforts to prevent him. “ But thou, thyself, didst madden me with thy coldness ; I knew not what I said or looked ! Forgive me ! Nay ! nay ! I cannot bear to see thee thus ! Thy

tears fall upon my heart like drops of flame! I meant not to sorrow thee, beautiful child! But man's spirit is hot, and brooks little; and even with the philosopher, passion sways all too rudely! There, dry thy sweet eyes with thy silky hair. Thy tears are too precious to be wasted for every idle cause! Now! thou lookest up again; yet thy cheek is pale. I will kiss off this thieving paleness, which has robbed thee of thy smiles with thy blushes. Thou needst not turn aside thy dear head; my stronger arms are round thee, and I can take what thou wilt not give! Thou repellst me so coldly! Canst thou not forgive, when so humbly sued for pardon? Ah yes! if the tale which thy soft blue eyes tell, be truth, and not nature's worst hypocrisy! Come; take thy lute, and sing to me one of thy dear Arabian songs. It will gladden thy heart again!"

"The chords are broken!" said Lysinoë, mournfully putting back the instrument.

"I did not see it—I did not see it!" replied Amasis hurriedly. "Fie on me!" he added to himself. "This girl makes me but a drivelling idiot, blind and deaf to all but her! And thou hast broken thy chaplet too?" he

continued, taking up the torn blossoms. "Why didst thou use thy lute and thy flowers so roughly? Wayward child! When wilt thou learn peace and control?"

"What have I to do with flowers?" answered the Ishmaelite sadly. "They come to me with their glorious eyes, luring me to freedom; their breath waves around me, bringing visions of the boundless plains, and the cool groves of my own home, where the air blows fresh and free, and the blood rushes through the heart, in a tide of chainless ecstasy;—where the blue sky with its cloudless brow, and limitless expanse, is the only canopy beneath which the proud spirit can exist! In an Egyptian prison, what have I to do with the blossoms of the Desert-child, the bright acacia tree? Can I love to see them plucked from their mother-boughs, to be bound into a formal headband, there to shimmer palely for a few brief hours, then slowly sicken and die? Can I love to see myself reflected in these pale petals, and my grievous story repeated in each withered cup? Take them hence! Take them hence! they and the lute! Its seven strings—each string a planet's chord—why should it

sound in the temple of a false faith? It is a mockery! a dread mockery! Surely my sorrows are many enough; I need not to add to their number. Give me freedom, Priest! and then I will braid my hair with Arab flowers, and sing to thee my Arab songs. And my soul shall go forth in each strain, happy as in days long past; and it shall hover with gladness through the wide sky, and pour blessings and a daughter's love upon thy way!"

"Sweet! why dost thou talk so wildly? Art thou not free? Lo! the whole space of these regal rooms is thine; thy goings out, and thy comings in, are unwatched. Thou mayst roam at thy will through these spacious walls. In the cool night I lead thee forth to rest by the brink of the laughing waves; to play with the wanton breeze; to nestle among the glistening flowers. But, because thou mayst not pass the Sacred Gates--because thou art kept within the temenos with as much jealous care as that bestowed upon the God of the Naos--thou dost bewail thyself for a prisoner! Is not this a folly, my sweet? Thou hast much, of which thou mightest well be proud! A Priestess of Amun--an Aider in the Mysteries--not every captive handmaid

could boast so much!" And he smiled; but through all the love and tenderness of that smile, might be discerned a slight shade of mockery.

"Thank the Great Gods of the Stars for this!" replied Lysinoë. "Thank them, my heart, that thou alone art constrained to be a liar, and the companion—aye! and the helper of liars!"

"I must not hear such language, even from thy bright lips!" said Amasis gravely, "for remember, that I am Priest of this same reviled religion! Here!" he added gently. "If thou wilt not have acacia-parlands—here are lily-bands for thee! Thou wilt not cast away the stately Moon-flower—the queenly Bride of the Nile?" And he offered her a fresh necklace of mixed blue and white lotus flowers, which hung on a stand that stood near.

Lysinoë tore it from the hands of the Priest, and trampled the blossoms under her feet.

"Thine Egyptian flowers are poison-weeds," she cried passionately. "Shall my brow be polluted with such? In truth no! For once the victim shall go unadorned to the Altar of

Sacrifice ! Give me back my home ; my mother ; my brave old grandsire ; my noble kindred ; liberty with the acacia-flowers ; then will I bless thee, Priest ! Then will I kneel to thee, and kiss thy hand in thanksgiving, as I do now in entreaty !” And the girl flung herself on the ground before Amasis, and taking his hand pressed it to her lips, while she bedewed it with tears.

“ And wouldst thou then love me with the same love as that which I feel for thee ?” said Amasis in a low whisper, grasping her arm, and forcibly resting her against his bosom. “ Promise to be mine, and this hour thou art free ! And this night I will flee with thee to thy native desert-islands—forsake fame, and place, and land, and hopes, brighter than all... brighter than thou dreamest of...if thou wilt but be mine own...my very wife ! Wilt thou love me, and wed me for the sake of thy liberty ? Lysinoë, speak ! Maiden—Goddess—Idol of my life—tell me that thou wilt be my own !”

Lysinoë gently unloosed the Hierophant’s hold.

“ Not even for this,” she said sadly, “ will I

promise to love thee ! I cannot ! And must I wait for my freedom, until that day dawn, it must be mine, only, in the grave !”

Amasis covered his face in his hands. He was trembling.

“ Amasis,” continued the Ishmaelite, laying her hands upon his arm, and speaking very gently, for her woman’s nature was stirred to pity, at the sight of the proud man’s sorrow and abasement. “ The heart cannot be commanded, nor its affections controlled. It is not in my power to feel tenderness for thee ; and thou wouldst not that I should speak deceitfully, and tell thee such and such things, when my heart within spoke contrary ? Yet, if I may not love, thy goodness can at least make me honor thee ; while tyranny towards a helpless woman, doth but add horror to coldness. Set me free, and I will revere thee, and pray for thy weal to my Gods, though I may not to thine...kneeling by thy side. Give me freedom...with no condition such as that with which thou dost offer it...and thou wilt be godlike indeed !”

“ Give thee freedom ?” repeated the Priest bitterly, and flinging off her clasped hands.

“ Yea ! when the red sun rises from the dusk west—then, maiden ! look for this gift from me, and not till then ! It is over. I loved thee madly ; but this shall pass. Thou hast scorned me ; thou hast rejected me ; and now we meet on other ground. We meet as Master and as Slave. Look to thyself, for thou hast one to deal with who never knew the pangs of remorse—whose soul gainsayeth ruth ! For this time, I quit thee. The next, stern shall be the arguments where formerly I used caresses and lavished fondness. Aye ! turn pale and tremble, coward heart ! What ! thou darest brave me, while thou didst deem my love secure ; and me too fast a captive in thy chains to rebel ? By the soul of Amun, thou hast missed thy mark for once ! Thy lover is now thy foe. Thy wooer is now thy tyrant. And thou shalt be in his hand as this ! ” And vehemently crushing an acacia bud in his hand, he flung it on the floor, and ground its crumpled leaves beneath his heel.

Lysinoë was silent. Terrified at his dark looks, she stood with her hands clasped in each other. A few large tears had fallen from her eyelids and rested upon her hair, and her

heart beat so slow and preternaturally still, it did not stir one glistening thread. The linen veil half shrouded her ; and she looked, as she stood there, like some pale, wandering angel. The Priest gazed long and earnestly. That glorious head half depressed—with its long, waving locks, like a funeral garment for her young heart's slain joy—falling in such rich luxuriance ; her pale cheek, looking still paler where the dark eyelashes rested, and the moist lips, crimson blushed ; her rounded arms pressing back all sign of emotion ; so still, so unearthly ; it nigh unmanned him as he looked ! Is that stern eye dimmed and relaxed ? It is even so ! The sharpest pang that the philosopher had known, since the Day first cradled him, shot through his heart then, when gazing on that young Arabian maid ; the maid he loved—the maid his selfishness was slowly devoting to death.

“ I shall go mad if I stay ! ” he groaned, shading his eyes to shut her out from his view. “ She hath bewitched me ! Oh Gods ! my brain is on fire ! ”

And he turned away. His steps were trembling, and his looks wild and wandering.

At the door he looked again. Lysinoë was standing in the same place and attitude as before; only paler, and her head sunk lower.

“Lysinoë!” breathed the Priest, “Lysinoë!”

She started, but did not answer, nor look up.

“Lysinoë!” again he whispered. “Wilt thou be mine? Now at this last hour make thy wiser choice. Wilt thou live free, and honored, and loved—or die, a captive, so friendless, and degraded, that the very daylight blushes to look on thee?”

The girl waved her hand.

“Speak! with thy lips tell me! Lysinoë! Angel! Beloved! Speak once again! If it be to curse me, speak!”

He had returned to her; and now flung his arms round her, and strained her to his bosom, while he showered kisses upon her forehead.

“I will die!” said Lysinoë, speaking very slowly and faintly.

Amasis dashed her away so roughly that she fell, and strode from the chamber. Despair and anguish were on his brow, and his fingers, straitly intertwined, were bleeding from the nails. He flung himself upon a couch in one of

the side chambers, and concealed his face in the drapery. Thus he remained for some time ; silent and motionless, like a dead thing. Then slowly rising, he passed into another small apartment, and sat down to study a closely-written papyrus roll. He was proud, and calm, and lofty as ever ; only his eyes were hollow, and he looked an older man than when he entered through the Garden Pylon.

A young gazelle, Lysinoë's constant companion, which had lain all this time beneath a chair, now came from its hiding-place, and trotting up to its sweet mistress, put its pretty head against her knees, and looked into her face, as if half begging for a caress, half offering comfort by its love. Lysinoë did not heed it. The little creature licked her feet, and tried to leap up, uttering an impatient, yet sorrowful cry, as it pattered its tiny hoofs about her. Lysinoë looked down, and then a burst of child-like grief broke forth, as she knelt on the floor and pressed the kid to her bosom, kissing it over and over as a bewildered babe kisses its mother's dear lips, sobbing the while.

“ My kid ! my kid ! my only friend—my faithful prison-mate ! How should I not have

seen thee? And thou didst follow me through all the horrors of that fearful day when the Egyptian tore me from my Arab home—and thou, alone, didst track my path when this false Priest stole me from my friendly captor! And I did not see thee, now, when thou didst offer me thy fond caresses to soothe my sorrow! Alas! thy mistress hath grown cold, and harsh, and selfish of late! My sweet gazelle!—with thy gentle endurance and thy gentle eyes, the sole thing art thou that I have to love—the sole thing that loves me; for that man's passion is darker than the darkest hatred! Oh! would we were both bounding over the wide plains, or loitering round about our own green home!—through the palm and date trees, chasing each other—my kid and I---striving who should first win the rewarding kiss of the soft-voiced mother. Poor thing! Thou, too, wouldest thy liberty! Thou mayest not have it! Nay---nay---nay! Imprisoned here, we must pine and die together. And we may not even be buried in our fathers' land. Yet I would love the spice-breeze to fan the blossoms round my tomb, and round thine, too, my dear gazelle! It would sing so sweetly to our released spirits,

when the moon-beams played with us through the wide ether ! Ah me ! ah me ! I cannot bear thy mournful eyes ! They make me weep. There ! thy cord is unloosed ; now away ! away ! Bound through thy marble play-ground, which with all its luxury, thou wouldst exchange for one rood of the free desert ! Away ! away ! Thou wilt not leave me ? Ah ! thou art better than many human friends ! I had one, the stately Egyptian warrior. And he swore to protect me ; but alas ! the dark Priest came, and bore me away from the roof of my brave master. And now he hath forgotten the captive maid to whom he used to speak so sweetly—so gently ! But she oft thinks of him !—when the stars come out, and memory is undisturbed by the Present. Yea, my kid ! he, too, hath forgotten me ! All have forsaken me but thee !”

And thus she continued, murmuring to herself like the south breeze entangled in the rose-bush—so sweetly—so sadly---that her own voice had made her sorrowful, had she had no truer cause for grief. But the Arab maid of royal race lay in the Egyptian Temple, a captive and a slave ; and the worshipper of

the Star-Gods, was a partner in the rites of the religion of Amun. And surely these were griefs stern enough to make an iron heart lament!

The golden toy which the Priest had held, and forgotten, lay on the ground. Its glitter caught the eye of the maiden. She turned pale, and hastily caught it up.

“O ye heavens! what do I behold?” she cried. “My Amulet broken? My father’s gift here? Oh! woe to me! alas! alas!” And she hurriedly drew the chain from her bosom. But from the last link depended a leaf as small, and precisely similar to the one which she had just found. “What magic is this? Am I awake?—or is this all a dream? My mother’s charm lieth here on the ground? Areia, my mother! art thou near thy hapless child? Mother! Let me say that word again and again! Oh! she is near me even now!” And the girl held out her arms to the empty night air. “Mother! mother, come! I have waited long for thee! Come and take thy child home! Ah! I know that she is dead, and that her spirit is waving round me, bidding me the last farewell before it soars up to the Starry Heavens. Alas! alas! she is dead,

and she has left me on earth alone ! Miserable Lysinoë ! one by one thy hopes fade and die ! Hapless maiden ! why dost thou live, and rather not die with with them ? Oh ! Death take me to Areia---my mother, Areia !”

“ Hush !” whispered a strange voice, which, rough and harsh, had yet a tender accent in its grating tones ; and a withered hand appeared at the casement. “ Be not afraid. I am thy friend. Come hither, Lysinoë ; come nearer. I have something to tell thee. Be of good courage. I will not harm thee. I would rather give away mine own life than hurt one hair of thy bright head !”

But Lysinoë shrunk away.

“ Wouldst thou be free ?” continued the voice. “ Say quickly !—yea or nay ! Wouldst thou be free ? Or dost thou love thy master Amasis too well to leave him again ?”

“ No ! no ! I would be free ! Oh ! grant me this ! Whoever thou art, deliver me from this Priest !”

“ Softly ! Amasis rests near, and my life is forfeit if he hears me. Send this ring to thy friend, Psammetichus, now at Memphis, but soon to be on his march toward Pelusium—and he will liberate thee, and restore thee to

thy home, and thy mother. Here! let me feel thee. Where is thy hand?"

Impelled by an irresistible impulse Lysinoe placed her hand in the hard palm opened to receive it. It was gently drawn through the unclosed window, and gently kissed; then dropped, and all was still. And but for the blue scarabæus ring left in her grasp, the Arab maid had thought it all a dream.

Carefully placing the massive ring in her bosom—more carefully, and tearfully, and tenderly, when she recognised it as the Blue Stone of Fidelity belonging to Psammetichus himself,—and securing the mysterious amulet on the chain which held her own, she seated herself by the unclosed window. And morning found her in the same place—her dark eyes strained towards the sky—her hands clasped on her fevered forehead—and her pale lips muttering, "Shall I be free? Mother! Psammetichus!"





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